

WILD WEST



A MAGAZINE CONTAINING STORIES, SKETCHES Etc. OF WESTERN LIFE.

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NEW YORK, APRIL 23, 1909.

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YOUNG WILD WEST'S COWBOY AVENGERS, OR, ARIETTA AND THE MUSTANG ROPERS. BY AN OLD SCOUT.



Arietta, still unconscious from the effects of the chloroform, was held tightly by the leader of the Mustang Ropers. It was an exciting chase, but Young Wild West and his friends were surely gaining. The young deadshot got his lariat ready.

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YOUNG WILD WEST'S COWBOY AVENGERS

—OR—

Arietta and the Mustang Ropers

BY AN OLD SCOUT.

CHAPTER I.

THE MUSTANG ROPERS AND THE STRANGERS.

Ten cowboys were having a lively time with a herd of wild mustangs on the prairie of Western Texas one afternoon, a few years ago, when the Lone Star State was not as thickly settled as it is now.

The cowboys belonged to the Two Bar Ranch, the brand of which was 2 —, and which appeared on all the cattle belonging to it.

They were certainly a likely-looking lot, as far as activity and horsemanship went, and not one of the ten had passed the age of thirty.

But a close observer would have noticed that the majority of them had the look of being young men, who had become hardened to the rough life they led, and to a degree that made them extremely reckless and without feeling for others.

Bud Lenney, the foreman of the bunch, certainly had a sinister look about him. His eyes were piercing black and his dark mustache hung down at the ends so much that it gave it the form of an inverted V, while the rather sharp chin and nose added to the sinister look.

But Bud was a good man at his business, and Dick Magee, his employer, had the utmost confidence in him.

The herd of about a hundred unbroken mustangs had escaped from the big corral down near the ranch house, and Bud Lenney and his men had followed the trail ten miles before catching up with it.

It was getting late in the afternoon, and if they were to rope the worst of the horses and get them all back to the corral before night they would have to work like beavers.

All of the cowboys were experienced mustang ropers,

however, and that gave them an advantage that just ordinary cow-punchers would not have.

"Boys, I'd give ten dollars ter know how them mustangs got out of ther corral," the foreman said, as they got the herd going back toward the ranch. "Someone opened ther gate, that's sure, 'cause it was wide open when we got there. Now then, who was ther galoot what done it? That's what I want ter know. There's ten dollars in it fur ther man what tells me. Oh, if I won't make ther galoot dance, if I find him! This here is what I call a whole lot of trouble fur nothin', an' there's a dance at ther ranch to-night, too. Why, we won't have time ter slick up any. It'll take till dark ter catch these wild critters, an' then, when we git 'em back in ther corral, it'll be so late that we won't have no chance ter jine in ther grand march. An' look at ther fun we'll miss! All ther gals fur miles around is goin' ter be at ther dance. It's ther boss' twentieth anniversary of his married life, an' he calculates ter make it a time that won't be furgot in a while, so he says. But never mind! I'll find out who it was what let ther mustangs out, an' then there'll be somethin' goin' on fur a minute or two! You all know me, boys. Yer know that I wouldn't think nothin' more of shootin' sich a galoot as that than I would ter pop off ther head of a rattler."

"That's right, Bud. You're ther boss mustanger of these parts, an' yer kin handle a gun second ter none. You've been through the mill, an' a man's life ain't worth much ter you."

The man who said this was an undersized fellow, who possessed a decidedly sneaky look, and it was evident that he made it a point to cater to the whims of the foreman.

"You know me all right, Bill Bent; you know me better than anyone here, 'cause you've been with me longer. You wait an' see what I'll do to ther galoot what let ther mus-

taugs out! I think I know who it was what done it, an' if he's got enough sand in him ter put up a fight there'll be a funeral at ther ranch, an' he'll play ther leadin' part in it."

"I know who yer think done it, Bud," the sneaky man retorted. "You feel putty sartin that it was Rolly Wise, ther young rancher, what's your rival fur ther hand of Nellie. Oh, I know! I'm a sort of a mind reader, I reckon. I think it was him, too. He don't like you fur a cent, an' I believe he'd do anything he could jest ter put yer ter trouble."

The foreman's brow darkened.

It was evident that the sneaky man had spoken his feelings for him.

"Never mind, Billy," he said. "We'll wait an' see. I reckon we'll be apt ter find out somethin' afore ther night is gone."

"Come on, Bud," spoke up one of the others, showing how impatient he was. "Let's get them blamed mustangs in ther corral. Ther longer we wait ther longer it'll be afore we do."

"Oh, I don't know about that!" was the reply. "They're goin' along putty nice jest now. Maybe we'll be able ter drive ther most of 'em in."

"I count on doin' that, Bud. Then ther trouble will begin fur fair. It's them what won't be drove in what'll make ther trouble. They'll have ter be roped."

"Well, we'll make 'em git a little lively move on 'em. Come on!"

Riding in a wide semi-circle, the mustang ropers bore down upon the herd.

The frisky steeds threw back their ears and went at a gallop, switching their tails defiantly.

In this way they went along over a rise in the prairie, and then the ranch house and other buildings came in sight, five miles away.

There was the corral, too, and so far, the herd was going straight for it.

It was just then that the ropers caught sight of a party of riders coming from the west.

There were three females among them, and they appeared to be heading for the ranch.

"Some of ther guests fur ther dance is comin' all ready," observed the foreman, as he looked at his watch. "It ain't four o'clock yet, either. I reckon they must have started putty early, or else they've come a long ways."

The riders they saw were yet a mile away, and as they looked them over as closely as they could they saw that two of them appeared to be boys, and two were certainly Chinamen.

The one other male members of the party was a man, for even at that distance they could see that he wore a mustache.

The air being so clear, objects were plainly discernible, even at a further distance.

The strangers were following a course that would cause them to meet the ten mustang ropers in a few minutes, and as he looked at them Bud Lenney frowned.

"What are they tryin' ter do, come along an' scare ther horses?" he exclaimed, after a rather lengthy pause.

"It ain't likely that they know what we're up to, Bud."

said one of the men. "It might be that they could be of some help to us, if they felt like it. Even them gals could help, fur they ride like as if they had been born in ther saddle."

"An' that boy there with ther long, light hair, what's ridin' ther sorrel, seems as though he was a part of ther horse hisself," observed another. "I don't know as I've ever seen a puttier horseman than he is. Jest look at that swing he's got when ther sorrel jumps! My! but he ain't no tenderfoot, nor never was."

Bud Lenney frowned again. He was not the sort of man to admire anything in the line of skill in horsemanship from anyone but himself.

He had got it in his head long since that he was the acme of perfection in that line, and all others were small, compared to him.

"Red Baxter, you don't think that boy puts up any better appearance in ther saddle than I do, do yer?" he asked, sharply.

"Oh, I don't know about that, Bud!" was the reply. "I wasn't thinkin' about you when I spoke. I know you're a king-pin at ridin' an' ropin' horses. But there's sich a graceful way about that boy's ridin' that I can't help but ter admire him. Jest take a good look yourself. An' watch that gal with ther yaller hair at his side! Yer never seen anything like ther way they're ridin', as far as the couple is concerned, Bud."

The party was rapidly nearing them now, and their every movement could be seen plainly.

The two Chinamen were bringing up the rear, leading loaded pack-horses.

They were falling behind gradually, for the others seemed to be inclined to join the mustang ropers as soon as possible.

Meanwhile the herd of horses was working nicely.

The animals showed signs of having gotten over their frolic, and it looked as though the men were going to have little or no trouble to get them into the corral.

When the corral was yet four miles away the party that showed such a dashing appearance joined the ten mustang ropers.

Whether it was because the mustangs became frightened at their appearance, or whether it was just because they took the notion at that minute, two or three of them darted off to the right like the wind, snorting and switching their tails in open defiance to everyone.

"Hey, there!" yelled the foreman. "Git after 'em, boys! Rope 'em! That's ther only way. Rope them what's feelin' so skittish, an' then maybe we kin drive ther rest."

Not only did the men ride to do Bud Lenney's bidding, but the six strangers joined in with them, the three male members of the party and the golden-haired girl preparing their lariats.

More of the horses went after the two rebellious ones, which was only natural for them to do, and then there was plenty of work on hand.

For the next ten minutes there was considerable excitement on the prairie.

Each of the four strangers roped a mustang in short order, the girl being the very first to accomplish the feat, and she got the most vicious of the lot, a roan stallion.

She handled him with wonderful ease, too, and it was but a minute or two before she was forcing him back to the main herd, which was now at a walk, as though undecided to make a break or continue on peacefully.

The ropers all got a horse, too, with the exception of their leader, who sat in the saddle, looking on, the frown still on his brow.

The two boys and the man of the strangers were attired in fancy hunting suits of buckskin and wore costly silk shirts of blue.

But the boy with the long chestnut hair that hung below his shapely shoulders was certainly the most dashing-looking one of the three.

He was handsome, too, and the sorrel stallion he was riding was one just fitted to him, for he was full of fire and showed every evidence of speed and endurance.

"Here you are, stranger!" he called out to the foreman, who had brought his horse to a halt, and was gazing at them half angrily. "I reckon we nipped the stampede for you. Now, if you keep them going you'll get them where you want them, which is the corral ahead, no doubt. We happened along just in time, I reckon."

"I don't know as anyone asked you ter interfere, young feller," Bud answered, snapping his eyes. "We could have done ther job ourselves. Another thing, ther mustangs wouldn't have started off like that if you hadn't scared 'em. Ther next time you'll know enough ter mind your own business, maybe!"

The boy looked surprised, but he quickly recovered himself, and a smile flitted over his handsome face.

"So our help was not appreciated, eh? Well, I am sorry for that. But never mind! Let it go at that."

"Don't git funny about it," sneered the foreman. "If yer do I might take a notion ter——"

"To do what?" the dashing boy asked, as he rode up alongside him.

"Ter slap yer in ther mouth, you sassy young galoot!"

"My friend," was the cool rejoinder, "I don't believe you could do that. Take my advice and don't try it."

This was more than Bud Lenney could stand, and he struck at the boy's face with the palm of his hand.

But the blow was neatly dodged, and before he could recover himself he received a slap on the side of the head that sent him from the saddle.

"I reckon you're just in the humor to take a thrashing, you sneaking coyote!" exclaimed the boy, as he quickly dismounted. "Get up and take your medicine!"

CHAPTER II.

YOUNG WILD WEST AND HIS FRIENDS.

What seemed rather strange about the whole occurrence was that the companions of the dashing boy did not seem to be the least bit excited over it.

They had brought their horses to a halt, and they sat looking on, just as though it was nothing out of the way that was taking place.

Bud Lenney could not have been any more surprised, no matter what happened to him.

But he was on his feet in a twinkling, and as the boy leaped toward him his hand dropped for his gun.

He got his fingers upon it, but that was all, for as quick as a flash a clenched fist caught him full on the jaw, and down he went like a log.

"So that is the kind of a galoot you are, eh? Well, I thought you was no good the moment I got a good look at you," the handsome young fellow remarked in a way that was decidedly cool and easy. "Now then, if you feel like shooting, get up and we'll have it out. I happen to be a pretty good one with a gun, if I am nothing but a boy!"

Some of the cowboys had dismounted, while all had come to the spot to see what was going on.

To see their foreman knocked down by a mere boy was more than surprising to them, and they looked at each other questioningly.

But no one uttered a word of protest.

Probably this was because they took note of the fact that the other boy and the man of the party had drawn their revolvers.

Bud Lenney sat up and looked around him. He was dazed from the effects of the blow, and it was evident that he did not quite realize where he was, or what had happened.

Meanwhile the boy stood within ten feet of him, watching him.

Presently the villain—for such he was, beyond the shadow of a doubt—arose to his feet.

He had collected his scattered senses now.

"Boy, yer done that mighty slick," said he, as he wiped his face with the sleeve of his shirt. "You kin lick me fightin' that way, but yer can't do it with a gun! Git out there, so I won't hit no one but you!"

This came rather unexpected, but the boy was not the one to back down.

His actions and his very looks told plainly that he was one who could be cool under any and all conditions.

"Do you want to die, you big galoot?" he asked, as he moved toward the open prairie, a smile playing about his lips. "If you do, just step out here. But say! I reckon it would be a mean thing to do, to kill you, so I'll just teach you something you never knew. Come on out here. Start in shooting as soon as you get clear of the crowd and the horses. It makes no difference to me when you begin. I make it a point to be always ready."

As yet the dashing young fellow with the long chestnut hair had not touched a gun.

He had one hanging from a holster at either side of him, and all it required was a quick drop of the hand and he would grasp one.

There was something about the extreme coolness shown by his conqueror in the brief fistic contest that caused a chill to creep down the spinal column of the foreman of the cowboys.

Never had he seen anything like it before.

Yet it was naught but a boy, who could not have reached his twentieth year, he was facing.

But Bud Lenney had only boasted of his wonderful shooting less than an hour before, and he was going to try and hold up to his claim, even if he had been worsted in a fight with nature's weapons.

He walked out, his right hand touching the gun at his side.

The boy now stood as still as a statue, his arms folded across his breast.

"Go ahead and shoot, you sneaking coyote!" he called out in a voice that rang across the prairie. "Let's see what you can do."

"An' ther first galoot what makes a move ter interfere will git his medicine in a hurry!" added the tall man with the dark hair and mustache. "You boys hear what I say, an' yer had better take heed."

"There ain't goin' ter be no one ter interfere, unless somebody interferes with us," spoke up Billy Bent, the sneak.

Bud halted within ten feet of the boy.

His hand was still on his gun, but he hesitated.

"Go ahead and pull your gun," came the command from the dashing young fellow. "Hurry up, or I'll drop you as you stand!"

The foreman hesitated still further, for he did not understand it. There was something strange in it all, he thought. Why should the boy command him to do something that might mean instant death for him?

Bud felt that there was no one living any quicker with a gun than he was, and he had his hand on one now.

All it required was a second and he would have sent a bullet through the handsome young fellow in the fancy buckskin suit.

But he made up his mind that the boy had to go down, and he jerked the gun from the holster.

Crack!

How it was done none of the mustang ropers knew; they were not quick enough to see, in fact. But the revolver that cracked was not Bud Lenney's.

The very moment the villain's eyes told the boy what he was going to do the boy's hand dropped, went up again, and the shot sounded.

Bud dropped his gun and shook his hand as though it had suddenly come in contact with fire.

The weapon had been shot from his hand, and so quickly that he could scarcely realize it.

"There you are, you big galoot," said the boy, coolly. "Now you know just how much your life is worth when you are standing before me. I have spared your life, though I am certain that you wanted to take mine. Pick up your gun and put it away. You are not hurt any. I just barked the back of your hand."

As pale as a ghost the foreman stood there, and for the space of a couple of seconds he did not move anything but the hand that had been touched by the bullet.

Then he looked at the back of his hand, licked the blood from it, and gave a nod.

"That's enough," he said. "You done that too slick fur me. I'll give in. But I'd jest like ter know who yer are, young feller."

"I don't mind telling you that. My name is Young Wild West."

"Starvin' coyotes!" cried the roper called Red Baxter. "Boys, we might have knowed that. You've all heard tell of Young Wild West, ther Champeen Deadshot an' Prince of the Saddle! No wonder Bud got took down! Hooray fur Young Wild West, boys!"

Eight of the mustang ropers broke into a loud cheer, almost before some of them knew what they were doing.

The two who kept silent were Bud Lenney and the sneak, the latter because he knew that it would but add to the humiliation his leader was suffering at that moment.

"Boys, let's git ther mustangs to ther corral," said the leader, as he mounted his horse, after picking up his revolver and dropping it into the holster.

He was apparently cool and unconcerned now, which showed that he must have a remarkable control over himself.

"I reckon we'd better help you finish the job," said the dashing boy, who had introduced himself as Young Wild West.

Bud made no reply.

But the boy nodded to his friends, and as the mustang ropers rode off they all followed, leading the captured horses with them.

The two Chinamen, leading the pack-horses, rode along well in the rear, neither of them seeming to be much disturbed over what had taken place.

It was not so very long before the corral was reached, and then in a short time all but two of the horses were driven in.

The two that escaped were wild ones for fair, and the way they scampered over the prairie was a caution.

"Come on, Et," said Young Wild West. "I reckon we'll get them. Don't follow us, boys. We'll soon have them."

The girl nodded her golden head, her blue eyes brightening at what the boy said, for she was no other than charming Arietta Murdock, the sweetheart of Young Wild West, the famed boy hero of the Wild West.

The majority of the boys throughout the land have either read or heard of Young Wild West and his friends, so there is no need in giving much of a description of them.

Suffice it to say that with his two partners, Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart, and the girls, as Anna, the wife of Cheyenne Charlie, the scout; Arietta Murdock, our hero's girl sweetheart, and Eloise Gardner, the sweetheart of Dart, were called, were simply making one of their trips in search of fortune and adventure when they came upon the ten cowboys and the mustang herd.

They had been heading for the ranch, for they had sighted it long before they ascended the rise that gave them a chance to see the cowboys and the herd, and when they did see what was going on they thought they would lend a hand.

But it turned out that the foreman had not desired any help from them.

But Young Wild West was well used to such things as that which had just happened. His coolness and daring, added to the marvellous skill he possessed, made him invincible, and never yet had he met his match with a gun.

He was certainly the ideal boy hero of the West, and Arietta, his sweetheart, was a girl well fitted to be called such, for she was a true Western girl, who could do as much with a horse or a gun as the average cowboy or scout.

The handsome and dashing young couple rode like the

wind after the two fleeing mustangs, their lariats ready to make the capture when the time came.

CHAPTER III.

AT THE TWO BAR RANCH.

Young Wild West and Arietta rapidly gained upon the two mustangs, for the wild steeds slackened their pace as soon as they got a quarter of a mile from the corral.

They were now galloping about in circles, acting in a playful mood.

"Et," said the dashing boy, who held the title of Champion Deadshot of the Wild West, "I reckon that fellow I just had the trouble with is a bad one. He has got a look about him that tells plainly what he is. He will be looking for revenge, I know. But I don't care anything about that. I'll be on the watch for him as long as we are anywhere around him. We made up our minds that we were going to stop at this ranch, providing it was agreeable to the owner, and that is just what we are going to do. It will be a change from sleeping in the open air, you know, and a little sociability with folks once in a while is needed. I suppose the galoot is the ranch foreman, but that makes no difference. We'll catch these two horses for him, and then we'll ride on to the house. Now then, you had better ride off to the left and gather in that buckskin. Throw him when you catch him, and before he gets up try and get a good turn about his nose. I'll attend to the bay."

"All right, Wild," replied the girl. "But this will only set the rascally foreman more against you. He didn't like it because we lent a hand, you know."

"Well, we can't help that now. We thought we were doing the cowboys a good turn, and after it has gone as far as this we'll finish the job."

The two now separated, and so well did they work it that they fooled the mustangs soon enough.

Arietta caught hers first, and she got him right, too.

After throwing him she got the turn about his nose, and that settled it.

Wild had a little more trouble, but trouble was nothing to him, as he had a way of getting over all obstacles.

A few minutes later they were riding back, leading the animals by short ropes.

They landed them at the corral, and as soon as they were inside, and the bars were up, Red Baxter rode over to them and said:

"I'm much obliged ter yer, as far as I'm concerned. Yer mustn't mind our foreman. He's a little sour to-day. He'll git over it, an' you'll find him a putty good feller at ther dance to-night."

"Dance?" queried our hero. "Where is there going to be a dance?"

"Why, at ther house, of course. Ain't that where yer was headin' fur?"

"Well, we thought about stopping at this ranch to-night; but we didn't know there was going to be a dance here."

"Is that so? Well, it's ther twentieth anniversary of

ther weddin' of Dick Magee an' his wife, an' they're goin' ter celebrate it with a rousin' old dance. We thought sure you was comin' on an invitation. Most everyone has been invited, I reckon."

"Well, we are strangers in these parts, so that is why we didn't get invited. If there is anything like that going on to-night I reckon we won't force ourselves in. We can camp out on the prairie, the same as we are in the habit of doing."

"Oh, don't think anything like that! You'll all git an invitation ther minute ther boss finds out you're strangers. He's that kind of a man, yer know."

At this juncture Red Baxter was called by the foreman.

"Come on an' 'tend to your business," was the call. "I reckon we want ter git through our work as soon as we kin. There's got ter be some extra rails brought over an' put here. We don't want them pesky mustangs ter git out ag'in."

Young Wild West nodded to the cowboy as he turned to obey his foreman, and then our friends rode for the house, which was but a short distance away.

As they rode up a comely woman of forty and a girl of eighteen appeared on the porch to welcome them.

"You're welcome, friends!" called out the woman. "We have been looking at you for some time, but don't seem to know you. But that makes no difference. You are just as welcome as though you were near relatives. Come right in, girls. The boys will take care of your horses. And you have two Chinamen with you, too! Well, they are something new around here. We haven't seen a Chinaman in a long time—never here on the Double Bar Ranch."

Right here it will be in order to say a few words about the two Celestials who were employed by Young Wild West and his friends.

They were brothers, typical of their race, and looked very much alike.

Both were as innocent-looking as could be, too.

One bore the name of Hop Wah and the other Wing Wah.

The former was the "handy man" and the latter the cook.

But Hop was something more than a mere servant, for he was a clever Chinee, indeed.

He was a sleight-of-hand performer of no mean ability, a card sharp, liked fun and was rather fond of whisky.

His brother was quiet and inoffensive, and was of the opinion that one clever one in a family was enough.

Both had become fixtures to the party that traveled so extensively through the wildest parts of the West in search of excitement and adventure, and they could not have been hired to work for anyone else.

The fact was that Hop had saved the lives of our friends on more than one occasion, and all through his wonderful work at so-called magic, combined with his way of knowing how to do the right thing at the right time.

The two Celestials bowed low when the mistress of the ranch spoke of them, and she no doubt thought that they were very polite fellows.

"I suppose you are Mrs. Magee?" Wild said, question-

ingly, as he dismounted and stepped over to assist his sweetheart to reach the ground.

"Yes, that's who I am, and this is my daughter, Nellie," was the reply. "My husband will be home soon now. He went over to the Forks this afternoon to buy a few little things we had forgotten. We are going to have a celebration here to-night, you know."

"So one of the cowboys told us. But I don't want you to think that we came here for the purpose of taking part. We are merely travelers, and when we sighted the ranch we thought we would come over and see if it would be agreeable for us to stop over night, providing we were willing to pay for the accommodation."

"I guess you had better not think of going any further to-night, or to-morrow, either," spoke up the girl, who was quite good-looking, and evidently a Texas girl, born and bred. "The more, the merrier, is the old saying, and it is mighty true in this case, isn't it, ma?"

"Yes, Nellie," answered the woman. "We were afraid there would not be many to come, anyhow. Our neighbors are few and far between, anyhow, and I did want to see a good crowd here."

"Well, here are three girls, anyhow!" and the girl smiled to show how pleased she was.

"I reckon I had better introduce you," said Young Wild West, and without any further waiting, he did so.

It was nothing strange that the mother and daughter should have heard of them all, for the fame of Young Wild West had spread pretty well over the country by this time.

To say that they were delighted to receive them as their guests would be putting it altogether too mild.

In a little while the horses were put away and the camping outfit stowed in a shed, where it would be all right in case of rain, and then Wild and his partners went into the house.

The two Chinamen remained at the barn until Wild and his partners were in the house, and then Hop suggested that they go around to the kitchen and see what was there.

Being servants, they usually did this when they came to a ranch.

But Hop had another purpose in view than merely going there to sit down and wait for his supper.

He knew there must be a servant or two belonging at the house, and he wanted to get acquainted.

The fact was the clever Chinaman felt in a mood to have a little fun.

The two walked around, and almost the first person they came upon was a buxom Irish woman.

She was drawing a bucket of water from the well that stood within a few feet of the house, and when she caught sight of the two Celestials she was so surprised that she let the bucket drop back into the well.

"Well, I niver!" she cried. "If here ain't two haythens, pig-tails an' all! Where did yez come from, ye foolish-lookin' pigs?"

"We comee ffrom China," answered Hop, affecting a very innocent way. "Me likee nicee Irish woman, so be."

"Yez do, eh? Well, don't yez give me any of yez blarney. I'll not stand it, begob!"

"Me gittee watee fur um nicee Irish gal," said Hop,

paying no attention to her remark, and hastening to the well.

Then he quickly drew up the bucket.

As it came to the top he dropped something in it, and then he poured the water into the pail that sat on the curb.

"Me cally in um house, so be," he went on, blandly, and then her face relaxed and a smile came over it.

She went in right after him, and Wing followed.

"Yez are a very obligin' Chinee, I must say," the woman remarked. "Here's a piece of cake for yez."

She gave them each a piece of cake and then she turned her attention to the pail of water that Hop had placed on the table.

With a kettle in one hand, she seized a dipper with the other and proceeded to fill it.

Suddenly a scream came from her lips, and down went kettle and dipper.

"A snake! A snake!" she cried, wildly. "Save me, Missus Magee! The well is after bein' bewitched!"

CHAPTER IV.

HOP ESCAPES A BEATING.

Hop made a run for the water-pail, as the Irish woman opened the door and ran screaming to another part of the house.

He quickly fished out what appeared to be a wriggling rattlesnake that was a full foot in length.

But it was nothing of the kind, save that it looked like the real thing.

It was simply a piece of solid rubber that the clever Chinaman had fashioned into shape and painted to imitate the colors of a rattler.

Hop got his trick snake and quickly got it out of sight.

He was not a moment too soon, for in came the mistress and her daughter, both showing great alarm.

Young Wild West was right behind them, for he had suspicioned the moment the first scream rang out that Hop was the cause of it.

"Take it easy, ladies," he said to the frightened women. "I reckon our Chinaman has been playing a joke on your servant. She declares there was a snake in the pail of water, and if there was you can bet it was only a rubber one. That innocent-looking heathen there is responsible for it."

Mrs. Magee and her daughter became calm right away.

"Call your servant in," our hero went on, when he found that they were so easily quieted. "I want to prove to her that there was nothing that could harm her in the pail, even though it looked so. Of course it is not there now. The rascal has taken it out."

"Me no undelstand, Mislir Wild," declared Hop, putting on a look that was quite equal to one of genuine surprise.

"You will understand before I get through with you, then," was the reply.

"Delia!" called the ranchman's wife. "Come here.

Young Wild West says the Chinaman simply played a trick on you. Come here at once."

The frightened woman was near to hysterics by this time, but the tone of voice her mistress spoke in did much toward bringing her to her senses.

Arietta took her by the arm and accompanied her to the kitchen.

"Be quiet, now," said Wild, addressing Delia, "and I'll soon show you that the Chinese was simply playing a trick on you. After you understand it I want you to give him a good thrashing, do you understand?"

"Faith, sir! It were no trick. I was after seein' ther snake swimmin' in their pail, begob! I'll——"

Wild interrupted her with a wave of his hand.

"Hop," said he, sternly, "produce that rubber snake."

"Allee light, Misler Wild," was the retort, and then out came the rubber imitation, still wet from the bath it had received in the pail.

Wing looked on, smiling faintly.

He knew that his brother had got himself in hot water, so to speak, and he rather enjoyed it.

The Irish woman shrank back when she saw the supposed reptile.

Wild took it from him and soon explained what it was to her.

Even then she would not touch it.

Delia certainly had a horror of snakes.

But when she saw her mistress and all the rest take the thing in their hands and smile, too, she began to grow angry.

Hop moved for the door, evidently thinking the sooner he got out the better it would be for him.

"Come back here!" commanded Wild.

"Allee light, Misler Wild," and he obeyed meekly.

"Delia," said the boy, turning to the Irish woman, "What do you feel like doing to him for playing such a joke on you as that?"

"Faith, the haythen ought to be murdered, sor," was the reply.

"Well, I don't want that done to him. Can't you think of something a little easier?"

"Well, thin, he ought to be bate good an' hard, sor."

"All right. Get yourself ready, and then you can do it. Come outside. Hop. There is no use in mussing up the kitchen."

"Allee light, Misler Wild."

Hop had to make the best of it now, and he knew it.

Wing was grinning broadly now. It was certainly fun for him, since many a time had his brother made him the victim of a cruel joke.

Hop went outside, acting very much like a lamb that was being led to slaughter.

Wild beckoned to Delia to follow, and he kept close to the Chinaman.

All our friends were on the scene now, and they all looked expectant.

Once outside our hero told the Irish woman to light in and give Hop a beating.

"Keepee way!" cried the Celestial, in a shrill falsetto voice. "Me no likee Ilish gal; she no likee me! Me allee samee makee dlop dead, so be!"

There was no doubt but that he was frightened; but

not as much as he made out to be, for as the woman made a rush at him to clutch his queue he stepped nimbly aside, and then he seemed to pull a fancy paper parasol from his mouth and raise it.

This was a little puzzling to Delia and she stopped short.

"Go ahead and give him the beating he deserves," called out our hero. "Don't mind what he does. He won't hurt you."

Then Hop calmly ate up the parasol, or seemed to do so, and as he showed his empty hands Delia's eyes began to bulge.

"Faith! I belave he's bewitched, sor!" she declared, looking at the young deadshot.

"No, he isn't; he's only a sleight-of-hand performer. He won't hurt you."

But Hop was not going to let that buxom Irish woman get her hands on him, if he could help it.

He moved back a little while she hesitated, and then he suddenly produced a match and struck it.

At the same time he allowed a quantity of grayish powder to drop to the ground at his feet.

Young Wild West and his friends knew that something was coming now, for the lighting of the match told them that.

And so there was!

Suddenly the Chinaman stooped and applied the match to the ground.

Instantly a thick smoke arouse, causing Delia to fall back in terror, and making the rest turn their heads to escape the fumes.

For fully half a minute the smoke hung there in a cloud and then it was whisked away by a slight breeze that happened to spring up.

Then Hop was no longer there!

Delia fell upon her knees and began to cry hysterically, while Mrs. Magee and her daughter showed signs of being much frightened.

"Whatever has happened?" cried the good woman. "Oh, what has become of him, Mr. West?"

"Oh, he has only played one of his clever tricks, Mrs. Magee," was the reply. "That is an old one of his. But you never saw anything like it before, so it is surprising to you. Don't be a bit worried. Just make Delia understand that the Chinaman has only played a trick, in order to escape from the beating she was going to give him. I'll prove to you that he is all right."

"Then do it quickly," spoke up the girl of the ranch, anxiously.

"Hop," said Wild, raising his voice slightly, "where are you?"

"Me allee samee here behind um well, Misler Wild," was the reply. "Me no wantee um Ilish gal beatee me and allee samee pullee pig-tail. Me be velly goodee Chinese; me no play some more ticks, so be."

"I don't want ter bate yer!" shouted Delia, rising to her feet. "I'll forgive yez, Mister Chinese. But plaze don't play no more tricks with snakes."

"Me be velly goodee Chinese, so be; me no play some more ticks."

Then Hop came around from behind the box that was

built over the well and stood rather sheepish-looking before them.

"I reckon that'll be about all," said Wild, smiling at the ones who had been frightened. "May be Hop will make up for this by showing some of his clever work in a more pleasing way to-night. I reckon he can do it if he takes the notion, and he generally does take the notion."

It was just then that two wagons and half a dozen riders were seen coming down the trail that led to the house.

"Here comes pop!" exclaimed Nellie Magee. "He has got some of the neighbors with him, too. Mother, some of them are arriving before supper, it seems."

"Well, that's all right," was the reply. "We've got plenty to eat in the house. I see that your father has got the fiddler in the buckboard with him. I am glad of that, for I was afraid he might be out of town, and then we would have had no music to dance by."

The cheeks of the woman flushed and her eyes brightened as she thought of the good time they were going to have in honor of her twenty years of married life.

"Rolly is coming, too," said the girl, joyously. "I knew he would come early."

"I reckon it must be your feller you're talkin' about," spoke up Cheyenne Charlie, a twinkle in his eyes. "Well, a gal of your age ought ter have a young man ter wait on her. There ain't no mistake about that."

"Yes, Rolly Wise is her young man," the mother hastened to say. "A nice young fellow he is, too. He owns a ranch fifteen miles to the south of us, and some day he'll be very well fixed, they say. Nellie is a lucky girl to get such a nice young man for a beau."

The girl blushed a lot, but Arietta quickly took her by the arm and led her aside.

"I know how you feel about it," she whispered. "Don't notice what Charlie says. He has a way of speaking just what he thinks, you know. But he means no harm, I assure you."

"Oh, I don't mind it!" was the reply. "Of course it makes me feel a little ashamed to have anyone to say anything about it. I am to be married in a little over a month."

The wagons and the horsemen soon reached the house, and then there was a general introduction, after which our friends talked with the newcomers as though they had always known them.

CHAPTER V.

THE RANCH DANCE BEGINS.

Rolly Wise, the young ranchman, had brought over some of the cowboys he had in his employ, and they were the horsemen who rode up to the ranch.

Dick Magee and old Buck Stiller, the fiddler, were in the buckboard, while the other vehicle, which was a big farm wagon, had a load of girls and women.

These were all from the little town ten miles away, and they had come by invitation of the farmer who owned the rig.

By the time they had all got thoroughly acquainted the supper was ready, and it was a little late, at that.

Notwithstanding the fact that there was to be a regular supper served somewhere along toward midnight, the mistress of the ranch put up a rousing good meal for the third one of the day, the same as usual.

It was a jolly crowd, as might be supposed.

Rolly Wise proved to be a fine young man, as the ranchman's wife had said, and our hero soon learned to like him.

After a while the subject of the arrival of our friends was brought up, and then Arietta became the central figure at the supper table.

Both Nellie Magee and her mother had seen how she roped the mustangs, and that was enough to make the rest interested when they heard about it.

But when Ranchman Magee heard how his foreman had acted in the matter he was not pleased.

"Bud Lenney is a peculiar sort of feller," he said, shaking his head and looking at his daughter, uneasily. "He's a hard one ter study, he is. Yer never kin tell jest what he's up ter. But he's been a good man fur me, all 'cept one thing."

"And that is that he has tried to court Nellie," spoke up Rolly Wise, nodding his head and looking at his sweetheart in a way that told his feelings toward the foreman.

"But he never got any encouragement from me," the girl answered, quickly. "I didn't want him to talk to me, and I told him so every time he tried it. Bud is nothing more than a villain, and I have often told pop so. He'll find it out some time, too."

"Well, if I do it will be all up with him," said her father. "I don't want no villains workin' fur me. We'll see how he behaves to-night. I'm goin' ter keep a watch on him."

"Well, he won't bother Wild, I reckon—not unless he gits a chance ter do somethin' on ther sly," remarked Cheyenne Charlie. "He got a double lesson from him, Bud Lenney did. He got licked in a fist-fight, an' then he found out that he didn't know how ter handle a gun. He sartinly stacked up ag'in ther wrong boy to-day!"

"He is supposed to be the quickest man with a gun in these parts," said Rolly Wise, shaking his head. "But I can't say that I ever felt afraid of him. Of course I don't want to mix up with him; but if he ever forces me to do it he'll find that I haven't been practicing with a gun for nothing."

"Don't have anything to do with him, Rolly," said Nellie, almost pleadingly. "He is just that reckless that he would not hesitate to do anything to kill you. I know he don't like you, because he said so the other day."

"He did say so, eh?" and the young ranchman's eyes flashed.

"Well, I don't know just what he did say, Rolly. But don't mind it, anyhow. Don't have anything to do with him."

Wild was watching the face of the young man and he knew quite well that he had been stirred by what the girl said.

That there was going to be trouble between Bud Lenney and the young rancher he felt almost certain.

"I'll keep an eye on Lenney when he shows up," he

thought: "and if Wise needs any help I reckon I'll be on hand. The mustanger wants the girl, and the fact that she is pledged to another makes him jealous, I suppose. Well, I believe Bud Lenney is one of the sort who will stoop to almost anything in order to gain his point. He has that kind of a look about him."

After supper the girls joined in with the rest of their sex to get ready for the big time that was to begin later.

The male members of the company went out on the porch.

As might be supposed, everybody seemed to want to hear Young Wild West tell something about the wonderful adventures he had passed through.

But the boy only smiled at them and declared that he was not good at telling stories, and that he never liked to tell things that might make people think he was boasting.

"I reckon Charlie can tell you a few things," he said. "If he stretches anything while he is doing it I'll stop him right away, too. Go ahead, Charlie."

"Well, I'll tell 'em how we cleaned up ther River Raiders down on ther Rio Grande, then," and the scout carefully lighted his pipe and proceeded.

He could tell a story in his own way that made it extremely interesting and his listeners remained silent, save now and then to give vent to an exclamation of surprise or admiration.

Charlie was just finishing his story when more of the invited ones rode up to the house.

Quite a bunch of them came, both male and female, which showed that they must have met at some point so they might ride over together.

They were quickly made acquainted with Young Wild West and his friends, and then the chattering of the girls and the laughing and talking of the men and boys broke the stillness of the evening on the prairie.

When it got dark lanterns were lighted along the porch and every lamp there was in the house was brought into service.

The ranch house certainly presented a gay appearance just then, and a lone traveler out on the trail might have wondered what it all meant, for such sights were not common in that region.

It was only natural that the girls who had come there should want to dance.

It was supposed to be a dance, anyhow, so that was all there was to it.

By the time all the lights were going nearly everyone who had been invited had arrived, and Mr. and Mrs. Dick Magee were the recipients of many congratulations, as well as a few trifling presents brought over by the wives of the different ranchmen.

The fiddler soon tuned up his instrument, and taking his place in the hall, so that a big room on either side of it might be used for the dancing, as well as the wide hall itself, he called out:

"Take yer pardners fur a quadrille!"

Instantly there was a rush.

Nothing would do but that Wild and Arietta and Rolly Wise and his sweetheart should take the "heads" in what was called the leading set, and Charlie and Anna, and Jim and Eloise the sides.

Then, when all were ready, the music struck up.

Buck Stiller simply played the old violin he had by ear, but in spite of that fact, he could fairly make it "hum," as the cowboys declared.

The innocent sport was in full swing, and the first dance was about half through, when the mustang ropers appeared at the house.

They were all shaved and togged out in their best, and when they crowded into the house they let out a whoop that shook the rafters.

But that was their way, and no one thought anything wrong about it.

But when Wild and his partners heard the yell they instantly became on the lookout for something to happen.

The ranchman had plenty of liquor in the house, and, as was the custom on such occasions, he treated the men at the very start.

Then they remained pretty still until the dance was over.

But after that they began mixing with the guests, shaking hands with this one and that, and talking to the cow-girls and their mothers in a light-hearted way.

Bud Lenney did very little of this, however.

He seemed to be in a thoughtful mood just then, and he had eyes for only three persons in the crowd.

They were Nellie Magee, Rolly Wise and Young Wild West.

Our three friends were not the only ones watching the villain.

Wise and Nellie were doing it, too.

After the dance some of the cowboys and girls went outside to walk around and enjoy the cooling breeze, for it was a very warm evening.

Wild and Arietta and Wise and Nellie went out together, but not until our hero had told Charlie to keep a good tab on Lenney.

Charlie was not long in getting into the company of the foreman, who had just accepted the invitation from his boss to take another drink.

"How are yer?" said Lenney, nodding rather coldly.

"Oh, I'm putty well," was the retort. "I generally is that way, yer know. But you don't seem ter be enjoyin' yourself a whole lot. Maybe you're a little bashful, an' want ter git up steam first."

"Oh, I reckon I'm all right! But say!"

"What is it?" and the scout turned around quickly.

"I don't want you an' your friends ter have no hard feelin's ag'in me. I done wrong this afternoon, an' what I got from Young Wild West I reckon I was deservin' of. But I've dropped it entirely. He's sooner with a gun than I am, an' that's all there is ter it!"

"That's ther way ter talk, Bud!" spoke up the ranchman. "I thought you wasn't ther one as would hold a grudge. Here's health, wealth an' plenty of happiness!"

Magee had been drinking with so many of his guests that he now had more than was good for him; but he was happy, and on such an occasion as it was, he could hardly be blamed, so the majority of those present would have no doubt declared.

Though the leader of the mustang ropers spoke as though he meant what he said, the scout was sure that he did not.

The peculiar glitter in the man's eye told him that much.

But he simply nodded and talked with them, just as though everything was all right.

CHAPTER VI.

LENNEY AND THE SNEAK FALL INTO A TRAP.

During the time that had elapsed since the corraling of the wild mustangs Bud Lenney had done some planning.

It need hardly be stated that he was working up a piece of villainy, which, if carried out, would create no end of excitement in that section, as well as cause considerable worryment to certain parties.

The fact was that he had decided to carry off Ranchman Magee's daughter, and then by persuasion, if possible, make her his bride.

If it could not be done that way, then force would be necessary.

Lenney knew he had certain men under him, who would not hesitate to do as he wanted them to, so he had taken three of them into his confidence.

One of these was the undersized fellow called Billy Bent—the sneak, as it were.

The others were ignorant fellows, who cared for nothing, so long as they ran in no immediate danger of falling into the hands of the sheriff.

The plan was that some time during the night the girl was to be caught and spirited away, without the knowledge of anyone but those interested in it, of course.

But they knew they had to take their chances on this, so they figured on what might happen if they were interfered with, or immediate pursuit started after they got the girl.

Having been in that section of the country for over a year, Bud Lenney knew it pretty well, and he had already selected a hiding place to take Nellie Magee when he got possession of her.

It was to a lone cabin in a ravine among the hills, something like twenty miles from the ranch, just outside the limits of what was termed the grazing lands.

This cabin had probably been erected by a hunter at some time, who had either abandoned it or died. It was hidden from view by a rank growth of weeds and vines, and it had only been by chance that Lenney had discovered it about a month before.

After leaving the almost level stretch of grass land the ground was so hard and stony that no trail would be left, and this gave the villain the impression that it would be quite easy to throw off pursuit and foil those who sought the girl and her captors.

Having arranged it with his three men, the foreman had come to the house with them, and he was now playing the part of one who was there with no ill-feeling against anyone.

But the reader can readily judge his feelings toward our hero.

He surely meant to be revenged upon the dashing young deadshot, who had made him look ridiculous before his followers, and had wrested the quick-shooting championship from him, as it were.

But if Bud Lenney hated Young Wild West he certainly had no love for the young rancher, who had cut him out of his girl, and whom he had blamed for letting the mustangs out of the corral, just because the sneak had suggested the thought.

The feeling the villain had for the girl might have been love, or it might have been something else; but, anyhow, he wanted her to marry him of her own free will, if possible, and he did not intend to harm a hair of her head, even if he was compelled to force her to become his wife.

He figured, of course, that she would submit and make the best of it after a certain length of time.

When Lenney arrived at the house and saw the girl dancing with Rolly Wise, in the set with Young Wild West and his friends, he felt like pulling a gun.

But he mastered the feeling and went on in, and when the cowboys began cheering for the ranchman and his wife he joined in with them.

There was only one way to carry out his plans, as far as he could see, and that was to make out that he was on friendly terms with everyone there.

He might have fooled Dick Magee, but not so with Cheyenne Charlie.

The scout meant to watch him all the closer after hearing him say that he bore no grudge against Wild.

"Well, boss," he said, after a while, "I see that Nellie is putty happy to-night. I suppose 'she'll marry Wise some time, by ther way things looks an' what I've heard?"

"I reckon she will, Bud," was the reply. "But that hadn't oughter bother you any. You know she never cared anything about you. You hadn't oughter feel sore 'cause a gal don't like yer. That ain't her fault, yer know. Jest make up your mind ter wish 'em joy, Bud. Nellie ain't fur you. She's goin' ter marry ther man she wants, an' she's gittin' a fine feller what'll take care of her right, too."

"Well, I never said I wanted her, did I, boss?"

"No, yer never said so; but I've knowed fur some time that yer did, though. Yer shouldn't have got anything like that in your head, when yer seen that she didn't give yer no encouragement."

"That's right. I know what yer say is right. But I never knowed fur sartin till now that there was any sure thing about her marryin' Rolly Wise. I always had an idea that he was jest comin' over here fur ther fun of it, meanin' ter make a fool of ther gal in ther end. But of course if it's a settled thing that he's goin' ter marry her, why, that's different."

"It's a settled thing, Bud. There ain't nothin' as will interfere with it now, without it's ther death of one of 'em."

The ranchman looked hard at his foreman when he said this, for he was thinking of what Nellie had said at the supper table.

But Bud Lenney did not by word, sign or look, let him know what his thoughts were.

On the contrary, he seemed to be resigned.

There were more than enough present at the celebration to make up the sets, so when the second dance came up our hero and those who had danced with him in the other set let others have a chance.

Some of the mustang ropers got in and danced, as there were girls there who were quite eager to "shake the light fantastic toe."

But Bud Lenney was not one of them to take part.

He was doing his best to appear pleasant and indifferent, but he could not bring himself to join in the dancing.

One thing he did do, and that was to drink whisky freely.

He was getting up courage, a thing that men often do, when they feel that they want to do something and can't quite bring themselves to it. Then is the time when crimes are committed that would not have been any more than thought of if the whisky had been let alone.

Bud moved around among the guests occasionally, and now and then he would hold a short whispered conversation with Billy Bent, who was his lieutenant and the one he depended upon the most.

The sneak would keep the other two, who were in the game, posted on what was going on, and what their leader wanted done, and in this way the plans were frequently changed.

It was along about the hour of eleven when Bud Lenney felt the need of more stimulant.

He had noted well where the ranchman kept the liquor—in fact, there was no secret about it, though it was deemed advisable to put away the demijohn each time it was visited by Magee.

He well knew that there were those there who would take unbounded delight in drinking it all as quickly as they could.

Cowboys regard such things as that as a joke.

Lenney wended his way to the rear of the hall, where there was a good-sized closet.

It was here that the whisky was kept, and as there was no light there just then, he knew that it was safe for him to visit the closet.

He walked leisurely through the hall, the laughter of the dancers, who were then taking part in an old-fashioned Virginia reel, ringing in his ears and grinding on his nerves.

The foreman stepped to the door of the closet and reached in for the demijohn.

He knew exactly where it should be, and when his hand came in contact with the head of a live human being it was not strange that he should be surprised.

He gave a start and stepped back.

Just then a pale blue light flashed in the closet.

A figure attired in the garb of a woman fell out against him, and with a startled cry on his lips, Bud Lenney fled through the open doorway.

But he no sooner got outside than he realized that someone had played a trick on him.

He happened to run across Billy Bent just then, and he was not long in letting him know what had happened.

"Who do yer s'pose could have put up a job like that?" asked the sneak.

"I don't know," was the reply. "But whoever it is, they ought ter git licked fur it. Let's go back an' do it."

It wasn't no woman that fell out of ther closet; it was jest a dummy. I know that now, though I didn't stop ter think that way at first. We'll go back an' make it warm fur ther galoot what's havin' so much fun. Ther chances is that he's took about all ther tanglefoot what was left, too. He ought ter be exposed."

"All right. I'll go back with yer. I ain't afraid of no sich work as that, I reckon."

The two made their way back to the closet.

All was still when they reached it, and listened at the door, which was now shut.

"Have a match ready, an' when I open ther door light it," whispered Lenney.

"All right, Bud," was the reply.

The next minute the foreman opened the door.

The match was lighted, but nothing in the way of a human being could be seen.

The sneak peered in and saw the demijohn in the back of the closet, which was quite a large one.

He stepped inside, and Bud followed him.

Bang! The door came to so suddenly that it almost took away their breath. A sharp click sounded, and then they knew they were locked in.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ABDUCTION OF NELLIE MAGEE.

Bud Lenney was not the only one to conceive the idea to steal whisky from the closet in the hall of the ranch house.

Hop Wah had thought of the same thing, and he had succeeded in taking out the biggest part of what there was in the big demijohn.

It was Hop's failing to like whisky, as the reader knows; but he liked to steal it as much as he did to drink it.

He paid two visits to the closet, both times being ready to surprise anyone who might appear there before he had time to get out.

The second time he sprung his surprise by lighting some powder and making a flash of blue light; and then he pushed the broom he had rigged up as a dummy woman out upon the rascally foreman.

But he had no sooner done this than he prepared for something else.

Hop felt pretty sure that the villain would come back, and he made ready to fasten him in the closet if he did.

Then Lenney would get all the blame for taking the whisky.

The clever Chinaman came out when he heard the man leave the house, and making sure that the key was in the door, he shut it and then stole outside in the darkness.

He had seen Lenney's face in the light he had flashed, so there was no mistake as to who it was.

It was Young Wild West's enemy, and that made Hop all the more eager to get him into trouble.

When Lenney came back with the sneaky mustanger Hop went right to the door and listened.

The moment he heard them go in the closet he crept up softly and slammed the door to, and then locked it.

Hop then walked calmly through the hall, and out of the front door, just as though nothing had happened.

But he had scarcely got outside when a pounding and kicking came from the interior of the house.

The two trapped villains were trying to get out.

Hop grinned and muttered:

"Lat allee samee velly goodee tlick, so be. Makee plenty fun, allee samee."

The dance came to an end a minute or two later, and then the kicking and pounding was heard.

Hop got close to Cheyenne Charlie and quickly told him what had happened.

The scout broke into a laugh.

"Good fur you, Hop!" he exclaimed. "So ther galoots was stealin' ther tanglefoot, eh? Well, it serves 'em right ter git ketched."

Meanwhile the ranchman located the sounds, and he started for the closet, followed by half a dozen or more.

"Fetch a lamp," he said.

This was quickly done.

"Who's in there?" he called out.

"Me," answered a voice.

"Who's me?"

"It's me, boss; your foreman, Bud Lenney," came from the closet.

"Ah! Yer went in ter steal my whisky, eh? Somebody locked yer in, did they? Well, that serves yer right, yer thievin' galoot!"

"Open ther door an' let us out, boss. We didn't come here ter steal your lick. There was somethin' strange goin' on in ther closet here, an' we come ter see what it was. Let us out an' we'll tell yer all about it."

"Oh, there's more'n one in there, then?" and the ranchman showed surprise. "Who else is there with yer, Bud?"

"Billy Bent is here with me, that's all."

"Well, I reckon that's enough. You two could clean up ther biggest part of that whisky if yer tried. Well, you're a splendid pair, I will say!"

"Jest let us out an' we'll soon make yer believe that we didn't come here ter steal ther whisky. There was somethin' mighty strange goin' on in this closet, boss. I went an' got Billy ter come with me ter see what it was."

"Let them out," suggested Wild, who had joined the crowd in the hall.

"All right," replied Magee, and he quickly unlocked the door.

As Lenney and the sneak stepped out they looked sheepish enough.

They knew that everyone believed they had been stealing the liquor, and that was quite enough to make them feel sore.

"Jest hold ther light in here, boss," said the foreman. "I'll soon show yer that we didn't come here ter steal ther whisky."

The light was moved to where he wanted it, and then the villain pulled out the dummy that had fallen against him when he visited the closet alone.

"That's what made me git Billy an' come here, boss," he explained. "I come through ther hall a little while ago, an' hearin' a noise in ther closet, I looked in. A blue light flashed in my eyes, an' then this thing come out ag'in me. I didn't know what ter make of it, so I run outside. I meets Billy an' tells him about it, an' then we

come in ter see what was up. I knowed that somebody had played a trick, an' we wanted ter ketch who it was. When we got here there wasn't nobody here, an' went in ter see about it. Then ther door was slammed an' locked. Honest, Boss Magee. I'm tellin' ther truth."

"Well, somebody sartinly locked ther door on yer," admitted the ranchman, scratching his head in a puzzled way, for he believed the story now. "But who could it have been?"

Wild and Charlie could easily guess, but they said nothing to enlighten him just then.

The majority of the cowboys and ranchmen believed that Bud was lying, and that the door had been locked by someone who did not know the closet was occupied.

They put the foreman and Billy Bent down as whisky thieves, pure and simple.

"This are what I calls thunderin' strange," said the ranchman, turning to our hero. "What do yer think of it, Young Wild West?"

"Somebody must have been waiting for them, so they could play a trick on them, I guess," was the reply.

"It looks that way, don't it?"

"It certainly does."

Bud Lenney watched his chance and got out of the house.

The sneak was right after him.

As luck would have it, they saw a young couple walking in the moonlight not far from the house.

The villainous foreman quickly recognized them as Rolly Wise and Nellie Magee.

"Git ther others here—quick!" he whispered to Billy Bent. "Now is our chance."

His companion heard and understood.

Four horses were saddled and bridled in waiting in a clump of trees not far away, and all they had to do was to seize the girl and ride away.

Bud had a bottle of chloroform, and he meant to use it on her, so there would be no trouble about it.

The couple walked right over to the trees where the horses were.

Bud Lenney was elated.

His heart beat faster now, and when he figured that he was going to get the girl he had made up his mind to marry at all hazards, and at the same time have the opportunity to kill the young man she loved, and thus throw away that obstacle that lay between them, he was nerved for the task.

Billy Bent soon got the other two, and then the four crept along in the shadows after the unsuspecting couple.

The sneak offered to be the one to use a knife on the young ranchman, so the foreman gave him permission.

Wise and the girls halted at the edge of the grove and stood facing the moon that was shining brightly in the southeast.

The villains got around behind them without being seen or heard.

Then, with his bottle of chloroform and a big handkerchief ready, Bud Lenney crept toward them.

Billy Bent was right at his side, knife in hand, and close behind them came the other two.

The couple were just leaving the spot to return to the house when the four villains sprang upon them.

The girl was seized in a twinkling and the saturated handkerchief pressed over her mouth and nostrils.

At the same moment the sneak struck at Wise with his knife.

But the little villain had made a miscalculation in the distance and the glittering blade simply struck the coat-sleeve of the young man and slit it nearly to the bottom.

The sudden move he made caused Bent to lose his grip upon the knife and it was wrenched from his hand.

The other three did not wait a second.

They heard the sounds of a struggle, and thinking the man had done his foul work, they hurried to the trees with the girl, who was still struggling, but rapidly giving away to the chloroform.

Bud Lenney mounted his horse without delay, and then the girl was handed to him, limp and totally unconscious.

He rode off without waiting to say a word to his companions.

The other two followed as soon as they could mount, expecting that Bill Bent would quickly follow.

But just then Bill Bent was in about the worst position of his life.

Rolly Wise was a powerful young man, and he had got a grip on the little sneak that was going to quickly overcome him.

But the villain struggled fiercely, however, and made vain efforts to draw his gun.

In a minute's time Wise had him.

Then he called out for someone to come to his assistance.

It happened that our hero was one of those to hear the shout and he ran to the scene in a hurry.

"What's the matter?" he asked, as he saw the young rancher holding a man down.

"This galoot tried to knife me!" was the reply. "There were others with him, and they have carried Nellie off!"

CHAPTER VIII.

A FRUITLESS CHASE OVER THE RANGE.

Young Wild West was astounded as the words of Rolly Wise fell upon his ears.

He had not expected anything like that to happen.

Bud Lenney had been caught in the closet but such a short time before that it hardly seemed possible that he could have time to carry out such a foul scheme.

Wild quickly assisted Wise and the sneak was made a prisoner.

The young deadshot quickly thrust the muzzle of a revolver under the little villain's nose and exclaimed:

"Tell me where the girl is—quick!"

"I—I don't know nothin' about it," was the stammering reply.

"Tell me, or off goes the top of your head, you little scoundrel!"

"They—they took her away," was the retort this time, for Billy Bent did not want to die just then.

"Who?"

"Bud Lenney has got her. He's goin' ter take her ter town an' marry her."

"Get your horses, boys!" exclaimed Wild. "We must

get after them. How many was there with Lenney, you sneaking little shrimp?"

"Two," was the answer.

"Are you telling the truth?"

The muzzle of the revolver almost cut through the skin of his forehead, and Bill Bent answered "Yes!" in a hurry.

Wild did not believe the story about the girl being taken to the town, but the rest of it he did.

No man would be fool enough to abduct a girl and ride over to a town and try to force her to marry him, for that would mean surely that he would be caught almost before he could make the attempt.

But Bud Lenney had taken her off somewhere.

That was very plain.

"Wise," said the boy, coolly, "I want you to get two or three of your men ready to ride all night, and next day, too, if necessary. We want to rescue your sweetheart from the villains, and we'll do it, too."

"Boys, you hear what Young Wild West says!" called out the young ranchman, who was much more calm than might be expected. "We are going with Young Wild West, and we are going to be the Cowboy Avengers, for when they are caught they won't live two minutes! I promise you that."

"That's right," spoke up Wild. "You are going to be the Cowboy Avengers, and we are going to help you. Remember that, everybody! Get your horses, boys!"

Charlie and Jim had already started to get the horses saddled.

Rolly Wise quickly selected three of his trusted cowboys.

"Hurry up, boys," he said. "You know what we've got ahead of us, as well as I do. Get the horses. Get mine, too!"

By this time nearly everyone who had been at the ranch house was on the scene.

Young Wild West hurriedly explained what had happened.

There was consternation among the women and girls then, and the men breathed vengeance on the villainous leader of the mustang ropers.

Mrs. Magee fainted, and that but added to the excitement.

"Take charge of this galoot and keep him alive till we get back," said Wild to Magee. "Lock him up securely—do you hear?"

"I will," was the reply. "Ther little scoundrel! He always was a sneak, but I didn't think he would do anything like this. Oh, but he'll hang all right!"

"Mercy, Boss Magee!" cried the sneak, for he was now thoroughly of the opinion that his time on earth was short, indeed. "I couldn't help it. Bud made me do it."

"Never mind about that!" and the enraged ranchman kicked him, bound as he was.

The cowboys kept him away, however, and they quickly hustled him into the house.

Into the very closet he had been locked in but a short time before he was placed, and then the door was not only locked, but two heavy chests were piled up against it.

Meanwhile Young Wild West and his partners and the

Cowboy Avengers, as they called themselves, had mounted their horses.

Wild felt that it would be useless to remain and try to make the prisoner tell where the villains were going to take the girl.

It was doubtful if he could be made to tell, anyway, and if he did he might tell them wrong.

It was best to try and catch up with the villains.

Wild's sorrel stallion, Spitfire, was a remarkable steed, since he had the instinct to follow a fresh trail made by other horses, no matter how dark the night was.

Fortunately for them, it was a bright moonlight night, and it would be for an hour yet.

"Just follow me, boys," said the dashing young dead-shot. "I am going to allow Spitfire to have his own way about it, and wherever he wants to go we will go."

"An' he'll come mighty near keepin' on ther trail, yer kin bet!" spoke up the scout.

"Jest let us git hold of Bud Lenney once!" exclaimed one of the cowboys, whose name was Billings. "We're goin' ter call ourselves ther Cowboy Avengers, so we'll have ther game, as well as ther name. We'll hang ther galoot to ther nearest tree, an' if there ain't no tree there we'll drag him with a rope around his neck until he's as dead as a salt mackerel! That's what we'll do, by jingo!"

"You bet!" shouted the other two in almost the same breath, while the young ranchman nodded his approval.

There was no doubt but that Rolly Wise was in a bad state of worriment.

That could well be expected.

But he was one of the sort who never look on the dark side of things, and that was keeping him up.

The confident way in which our hero had spoken served to make him feel that there was hardly any doubt but that his sweetheart would be saved from the scoundrels.

But even if she was served, and it was found that she had not been harmed in the least, the crime must be avenged.

He had made up his mind to that, and hence he was satisfied to call himself and his three men the Cowboy Avengers.

On rode the party of seven across the prairie in the bright moonlight.

The villains had got a good five minutes the start of them, if not a little more than that, so it was impossible to catch sight of them.

But Wild was confident that as long as they kept upon the grazing land the sorrel would be able to keep upon the trail.

If they struck a place where the ground was hard and stony it might be different.

"You are pretty well acquainted around this region, I suppose," he said to Wise, as he slackened speed and allowed the rancher to come alongside him. "Is there a wood, or rocky ground anywhere around?"

"There's both, Wild," was the reply; "and the worst of it is, we are heading right for it by the nearest cut possible. I fear that the villains will elude us, after all."

"Now, don't go to thinking that way. Just make up your mind that we are going to get them. This is a fight between the Cowboy Avengers and the mustang ropers. We are going to win out!"

"Well, I have faith enough in you to believe we will, anyhow. I won't give up until you do, Wild."

"All right, then. I reckon you'll never give up. We are going to catch the mustang ropers, and we are going to get your sweetheart back, safe and sound, too. Just keep that in your head, and don't let anything push it out, either."

"All right. It is there, and it will stay there."

In about twenty minutes Wild saw the uneven hills ahead of them.

He knew that they were rapidly leaving the cattle range, but he did not think of despairing.

That they must have gained some on the villains he felt sure, but just how much, it was hard to tell.

Of course they would proceed as fast as they could; that was but to be expected.

Ten minutes later they struck the ground where the grass only grew in patches, and where the ground was very hard.

It was then that the sorrel showed signs of wanting his master to guide him.

But Wild let the reins lay slack on his neck, hoping he would keep at it.

Spitfire did, for about two miles, and then he slowed down and came to a walk.

"Well, I reckon it is for us to hunt for the galoots now," Wild observed. "There is no longer a trail, it seems. If Spitfire could only see where the horses went he would keep right on; but he can't, so we couldn't, either, if it was broad daylight. I reckon we have covered over a dozen miles now, and it seems rather strange that we haven't come up with the galoots. But never mind. We'll find them."

The boy was certainly not discouraged.

But really the chance of finding where the villains had gone was almost a hopeless one in the dark.

The moon would soon disappear, and then they would only have what little light the stars afforded to assist them.

Wild selected a high ridge that must have been miles away, and toward this he led his partners and the Cowboy Avengers.

At last the foot of the ridge was reached.

But there was nothing to indicate that those they sought were there.

They searched about until it began to grow daylight, and then our hero was forced to admit that they had better go back to the ranch and try and force Billy Bent to lead them to the place they had planned to take the girl captive.

CHAPTER IX.

ARIETTA IS ABDUCTED, TOO.

It has been said that the cowboys calling themselves the mustang ropers were, for the most part, a bad lot.

This was true enough, though Bud Lenney had selected but three of them to help him carry out his dastardly scheme.

He had picked them because he felt sure that they could be depended upon.

There was one among them, named Lippy Grant, who

was about as bad as any of them, when it came to the point.

He was not more than twenty-five, but during his life he had done almost everything in the way of villainy.

It so happened that this young villain had become deeply impressed by the rare beauty of Arietta Murdock, and when he saw her rope the mustangs out on the range he had vowed that he would make love to her before the night was over, providing he got the least bit of a chance.

After the abduction of Nellie Magee, Lippy Grant became imbued with the idea of doing the same thing to Young Wild West's sweetheart.

He, nor the rest of the ropers, knew nothing of the plans of Bud Lenney and the three he had in his confidence, and they told such straight stories about it that they were not blamed in any way for what had happened.

Red Baxter had shown himself so willing to go in pursuit that no one doubted his sincerity.

And he declared that he would be the one to put the noose around the neck of Bud Lenney when he was caught, if they would only let him.

"Red is all right, anyhow," declared Ranchman Magee. "I always knowed he could be depended on. But Bud was always a tricky galoot, though it is a sure thing that he always done his work well. But he's gone an' done somethin' now that has marked him fur death. He's got ter be hung, if he ain't shot afore it kin happen. My poor little gal! I never would have thought anything like this could happen."

The man broke into a flood of tears, it being the third or fourth time for him to do it since the abduction took place.

His wife had recovered somewhat, and under the care of Arietta, Anna and Eloise was getting along as well as could be expected.

They had nothing but words of cheer for her, and as they were really confident that Nellie would be rescued they did not have to force themselves to talk that way.

The night passed.

Lippy Grant had been trying to plan a way to get Arietta and ride away with her.

It had been on his mind so long that it had now become a sort of mania with him.

He knew of the hiding place in the gully, for he had been there with Bud Lenney, and he selected that as the spot to take the girl.

True, he thought that Bud might have taken Nellie there, but that should make no difference.

There would be room for another girl.

It is strange that how a man inclined to commit a crime can lose all caution; yet thinking that he is going to make a safe and sure thing of it.

It was the case with Lippy Grant.

The more he brooded over it the more he became convinced that he could do it.

But the chance to make even an attempt to get hold of the girl did not come, and when daylight arrived the villain was still thinking of it.

Billy Bent was locked in the dark closet, with two men to guard him, and when it suddenly occurred to him that the sneak might be of great help to him, and he more than

willing to lend that help, if he received his liberty for doing it, Lippy decided to set him free.

He had not slept a bit since the night before, but that made no difference.

His state of mind would not permit him to sleep, and until he carried out the set purpose he had in his mind he did not intend to close his eyes.

Shortly after daylight came he walked into the hall, where the closet was located.

The two men, who had remained there since about two o'clock, had dozed off and were snoring.

Lippy watched them, and when he saw that they would rouse themselves to fight off the feeling of drowsiness, he felt that it would be safe to risk it.

He took a look around, and finding no one else in sight just then, he crept up to the door of the closet.

Lippy Grant knew quite well that if he was discovered attempting to set the prisoner free his life would not be worth much, but he had the thought of abducting the golden-haired girl in his mind so strongly that he was ready to take any kind of a risk.

As luck would have it, the two guards did not awaken.

The villainous mustang roper turned the key in the lock, and almost before he was aware of it, the sneak stepped out.

His hands were tied behind him, but his feet were free to carry him away, and with a nod of satisfaction, he stepped lightly to the door at the end of the hall, which was half open, and went out into the dull gray light of the morning.

Lippy followed him, after first closing and locking the door of the closet.

Elated at his success, he was now sure that he was going to succeed in his purpose.

One of the men awoke as he went out, but he saw the closed door right before him and he gave way to the drowsy feeling again.

Lippy soon joined the little sneak, who had crept behind an outhouse the minute he got outside the ranch house, hoping to find a horse ready for him.

"So yer got ther chance ter git me out, did yer, Lippy?" he said in a whisper. "I'm mighty glad of it. I'll do somethin' fur you."

"That's jest what I took ther risk of gittin' yer out fur, Billy," was the reply. "I want yer ter help me kidnap that yaller-haired gal they calls Young Wild West's sweetheart. Don't look surprised, 'cause I've got ter have it done. I've made up my mind that I'm goin' ter git her, if I die ther next minute after I do. Now then, you've got ter help me, or else git riddled with bullets. I'll call out that you've got out of ther closet if yer don't agree ter do as I want yer to."

The sneak's face changed to all sorts of expressions in quick succession.

But he realized that he was in the power of a man, who had temporarily lost his mind, and that meant that he must humor him, if he wished to make his escape from the ranch.

"I'll do anything yer say, Lippy," he whispered. "Don't talk so loud. If you've made up your mind ter have that gal I'll help yer. I happen ter know that Bud dropped ther bottle of chloroform he used on ther other gal, but

not until he put ther cork back in it. Ther very gal you're after now picked it up an' took it in ther house. I heard 'em talkin' about this, fur I could hear about all what was said, yer know. You git that bottle of chloroform, an' it will be easy. I'll sneak off an' git a horse."

"No, yer won't!" retorted Lippy, a peculiar glitter showing in his eyes. "You want ter git a chance ter ride away. But that won't do, Billy. When yer go I'm goin' with yer, an' so's that gal. If you know where that bottle of pizen stuff is, go an' git it. Go an' git it, or I'll shoot yer dead! Do yer hear what I say?"

There was no question in the mind of the sneak but that he was listening to a madman now, and trembling with fear, he signified his willingness to do as he was told.

He had heard someone say that Arietta had taken the bottle in the house, and that it was on a shelf in the kitchen.

But how was he to get there without being discovered?

That was the question that puzzled him just then.

But when he looked at Lippy Grant again, and noticed that his hand was playing with the butt of a revolver, he made up his mind that it was his only chance, so he started for the kitchen.

Luck was with him, it seemed, for there was no one in the kitchen just then.

He crept inside and found the bottle on the shelf.

Where Bud Lenney had obtained it he did not know; but it made no difference to him. He had it, and he was going to give it to Lippy.

It happened that Lippy could read, and he spelled out the name on the label to his satisfaction.

"Bud got this from a doctor he held up an' cleaned out one night about a month ago," he said, in a whisper, and nodding at the same time. "He got a whole lot of medicine, but blamed little money. I remember."

As if the fates had decreed it, who should come out of the house just then but Arietta.

The girl had passed a sleepless night with Mrs. Magee, and she felt the need of a little fresh air.

She came out as far as the well and stood there, looking toward the east, where the first yellow streaks were beginning to show.

As stealthy as a cat, Lippy stole upon her, soaking a handkerchief with the chloroform as he did so.

Suddenly he leaped upon her, and before she could cry out, the powerful drug was being inhaled by her through both mouth and nostrils.

In vain did the girl try to break away. With the strength of a madman, Lippy held her until her muscles relaxed, and her breathing was so faint that it seemed as if she was dead.

"Git ther horses, you sneakin' galoot!" said the villain, hoarsely, as he turned to his companion. "You know where they are. Hurry up!"

Then, as the little villain started from the spot, he carried the girl bodily after him.

The good luck that had followed them still remained with them, and the horses were soon reached.

Then they mounted, and with Lippy Grant in the lead,

the unconscious girl in his arms, they rode away toward the ridge.

CHAPTER X.

THE VILLAINS REACH THE SHANTY.

Bud Lenney and his two companions certainly did not allow the grass to grow under their horses' hoofs.

When they became convinced that Billy Bent was not coming, they did not slacken pace one bit. The villainous foreman wanted to get away, and if one of his companions got caught he felt that it must be his own fault.

The foreman's horse was a powerful, as well as speedy one, and the double burden it carried did not stop it from taking and keeping the lead.

A little over five minutes' start in a race of that kind makes a vast difference, and if they could keep up the hot pace they had started at very long the three were sure to outwit their pursuers.

Lenney knew this, and he did not mean to waste any chances.

He meant to keep his own horse going as long as the animal could keep upon its feet.

When about five miles had been covered, and there were no sounds of pursuit, the leader began to feel more confident than ever.

But he felt a little sore about the sneaky cowboy, for he felt that he needed him.

"I s'pose he made a miss of it, an' that Wise got him instead of being got himself. Well, if he did, he ain't goin' ter git away. I'll fix him, an' I'll fix Young Wild West, too!"

Neither of his men said a word until another five miles had been about covered.

Then they appeared to feel that there was little danger of being caught, and they rode up alongside their leader.

"Bud," said one, "what do yer s'pose happened ter Billy?"

"He made a miss of it an' got his medicine, most likely," was the reply.

"It's too bad, ain't it?"

"It sartinly is. But he wanted ter do ther knifin' on Wise, an' I said fur him ter go ahead. He couldn't have gone ahead in their right way, though. Somethin' must have happened."

"Well, I seen 'em rollin' over an' over on ther ground," spoke up the other man. "Maybe he got ther knife in ther galoot, but couldn't git away afore somebody come."

"Oh, he had time enough ter git away," answered Lenney. "He made a miss of it, that's all; an' he got ther worst of it. Wise might have grabbed ther knife an' give it ter him with it. He's a putty powerful feller, anyhow."

The two men said no more.

But it was evident that they were beginning to realize that they had done a bad thing by going into the game with Bud Lenney.

They had not thought of what might happen after the abduction took place before, and now it came to them very forcibly.

One thing about it, they would never dare show themselves again to their former companions and employer.

They were marked men, and they knew it.

But they had to make the best of it now.

They were outlaws, from that time on.

After what seemed a rather long time the gully, or ravine, as it might have been called, was reached.

Still there were no signs of pursuit.

Lenney was satisfied that there couldn't be now, for no matter how light it was, the hoofprints of their horses would not show after they left the grass land.

The only thing that might happen to their disadvantage would be in case anyone rode up the gully and came to the tangled maze of weeds and vines that they must ride through before reaching the deserted shanty.

There would have to be a trail left, and that could be discovered.

But Lenney figured it that it might rain before anyone got as close as that to them.

He led the way around the thicket as much as possible, and then he approached the hidden shanty from the other side.

The shanty was built half in a sloping bank and the overhanging boughs and the tall weeds and vines hid it completely.

Nellie Magee had come to by this time, but she felt ill from the effects of the chloroform, and she was not able to stand when she was lifted from the back of the tired horse.

Into the shanty went Lenney, he opening the door himself.

There was a musty odor there, but this did not seem to bother him any.

Across the floor he went to the rear of the building, and there behind a big bearskin was an opening amply large enough to admit a man.

He crowded through this with the girl in his arms, and then he put her upon her feet, holding her up with his left arm, while he struck a match.

As the tiny flame lighted the place it showed that they had entered a cave.

"Everything is all right, boys," said the villain; but his companions were outside with the horses, and they did not hear him.

When he found this to be the case Lenny simply carried the girl to a corner of the cave and dropped her gently upon a pile of skins.

Nellie was not able to hold up her head now, and she sank back into a sort of stupor.

The chloroform had certainly affected her badly.

"Take it easy, Nellie," Lenney said, soothingly. "If I hadn't loved yer so much I wouldn't have done this. But I jest couldn't help it, that's all. You'll find I'll make a good husband, see if yer don't! When we git it all done with we'll go back an' ask your dad's forgiveness. He'll be satisfied, if you are, I know he will."

The girl murmured something that was not intelligible and fell to weeping bitterly.

The match went out then, so Lenney lighted another.

Then he quickly found a lantern and lighted it.

This he sat on the floor of the cave apartment, and then leaving Nellie to herself, he went out to his companions.

"Boys," he said, "everything is jest as it was ther last time I was here. I don't know who built ther shanty, or who lived in it last, but ther one what did live in it left

a lot of good cured skins here. They come in mighty handy fur this game, I kin tell yer!"

"Where are we goin' ter put ther horses?" asked one of them.

"Right around to ther left of ther shanty. Ain't yer never seen what a fine place there is there ter keep horses? We could have half a dozen of 'em there, if we wanted ter. There's a natural roof of rock that hangs out over ther face of ther bank, an' there's ther side of ther shanty on one side an' ther bushes an' trees on ther others. Oh, this is a hidin' place all right."

"Yes, but how long do yer intend ter stay here?" the other man spoke up.

"Not very long. It won't take long ter convince ther gal that I'm ther right man fur her ter marry. Then we'll settle ther whole business."

"Well, I reckon we had better make up our minds that we're outlaws, jest ther same," said the one who had spoken first. "It ain't likely ther boys on ther ranch will have any use fur us after this, no matter if you do marry ther gal. They'll be sore on us, an' it'll be a case of pick at us all ther time. Fur my part, I'd jest as leave become a knight of ther road, as they call a robber. I was in sich a band once, an' we made lots of money until we got broke up. We got a little too reckless, yer see. I reckon about three fellers could work ther hold-up game nice in these parts. But yer don't want ter do it twice in ther same place."

"Well, I reckon I know somethin' about that game," said Lenny. "Didn't I hold up that galoot of a doctor? An' didn't I git a whole lot of medicine, an' blamed little money? Well, I guess I did! That's where I got my chloroform from. But I went an' lost that bottle, but I've got another one in my saddle-bags. Yer see, I've got everything I could carry with me, 'cause I come prepared ter lay low a while. It's too bad that Billy got nipped. He had ther fryin'-pan an' coffee kettle."

"There ought ter be sich things here in this shanty, I should think."

"Maybe there is. Jest tie ther horses, an' we'll look around. I reckon ther gal is so sick from that stuff I made her breathe that she won't take much notice of things fur a while."

The horses were soon unsaddled and tied under the overhanging rock, and then the villains went into the shanty.

So well did the bearskin cover the opening that led into the cave in the rear of the shanty that the light scarcely showed.

"I reckon we'd better not show a light here in ther front part of ther shanty," said one of the two followers of the villain. "If that galoot of a Young Wild West is after us it might be that he'd see it. He's a mighty bad one ter have after yer, I reckon."

"Well, I don't care if he does come along, providin' he's alone," Bud declared. "I'd soon fix him."

Seeing that the girl was lying still on the pile of skins, he turned his attention to making a search of the shanty.

A rusty old frying-pan was discovered, but that was about all there was in the line of cooking utensils there was to be seen.

"Now, boys, I reckon we may as well go ter sleep fur

ther rest of ther night. 'There ain't no danger of bein' found. Don't let anything like that worry yer."

In a few minutes he had arranged a curtain to make it a little more private for the girl.

Then he spoke kindly to her, but received no reply.

"I reckon she'll be all right in ther mornin'," he observed. "I'm goin' ter try ter sleep. I need it."

"So do we, Bud."

It was not long before they were ready to lie down and then they gave in to the strenuous work of the day.

CHAPTER XI.

YOUNG WILD WEST IS SURPRISED.

As Young Wild West rode with his two partners and the Cowboy Avengers toward the ranch it grew lighter every minute.

Rolly Wise was now showing signs of being discouraged.

The fact that they had been unable to find his sweetheart, after having been so long on the hunt, made it look as though it would be a hard task, indeed.

He knew how reluctant Wild was about turning back to the ranch, and that made him feel all the worse.

But the dashing young deadshot soon cheered him up by declaring that they would get the prisoner and make him take them to the spot where the villains had carried the girl.

"The sneaky galoot certainly must know where they were going, because plans must have been laid in advance. He'll be mighty glad to lead us there, I think."

"If he only does know," the ranchman replied, hopefully.

"Well, the chances are that more of the gang that is called the mustang ropers knows. We will soon get to the ranch, and then we will find out something. If I had thought it was going to turn out this way I should have put some questions to certain ones of them before we set out. But I wanted to lose as little time as possible, and that is why I didn't."

"Oh, we'll git ther galoots, an' ther gal will be all right; there ain't no mistake about that," Cheyenne Charlie spoke up. "Don't git worried, Wise. I've seen worse fixes than this one, an' everything has turned out right, too. We've been through all kinds of things, we have. We've had our own gals abducted, as yer call it, more'n once, an' they've always come out without a scratch. If that galoot is in love with ther gal, which seems ter be ther case, he'll treat her with ther greatest of respect. That means that he'll do his best ter try an' make her think she ought ter have him, an' not you. Of course she won't think that way; I ain't sayin' that 'cause I think anything like it, either. I'm jest drawin' up a line on ther things Bud Lenney would most likely do. He'll try his best ter make ther gal give in an' marry him. He'll give her time ter think it over, of course. If he is in love with her enough ter take the risk of stealin' her he'll sartinly treat her right."

"I don't like to think about it," the young rancher declared. "But wait till we get Bud Lenney! If there isn't a hanging I'll eat my hat!"

"You bet!" echoed the three cowboys.

Straight for the ranch they rode, and it kept growing

lighter all the time. Soon the sun came up and the day had begun in earnest.

Suddenly they saw a couple of horseman approaching from the direction of the ranch.

They had just reached the top of a rise of the prairie, and the moment our hero caught sight of the riders he called a halt.

There was something wrong about the two horsemen, he thought, though they were so far away that they could not be distinguished very well.

But the sharp eyes of the boy quickly told him that one of the horses was carrying more than one person.

At first it flashed upon him that it might be Bud Lenney and the girl he had stolen from the ranch, with one of his villainous companions.

But he soon rid himself of that thought, for no man would have been fool enough to double and go back where danger was waiting for him.

"What do yer make 'em out ter be, Wild?" the scout asked, as they remained at a halt and watched. "I thought one of 'em might be Hop, but I see it ain't no Chineese."

"No, Hop is not there, Charlie," was the reply. "It looks to me as though one of 'em has got someone on his horse with him. It may be that a couple of the mustang ropers have caught one of the girls and followed the example of their leader. We can't tell but that all of the girls have been marked to be carried off. There is only one man among that gang I would care to trust, and that is the fellow they call Red Baxter."

"Such a thing could be done, I suppose," Jim Dart observed. "It is not likely that anyone at the ranch would think it necessary to watch anyone save the prisoner they have got there. They certainly would not think that there was any danger of anyone else being spirited away from the ranch."

"Well, I reckon we had better pull back a little, so they won't be so apt to see us," said our hero. "If we ride on up to the higher ground they'll see us plain, and then, unless they prove to be friends, they'll light out to get away from us. We'll let them draw a little nearer, and then we may be able to recognize them, if we have ever seen them before."

They drew back and dismounted.

Then they waited and watched.

Nearer came the two horses.

And the nearer they came the more our hero was convinced that they carried three persons, instead of two.

One of them surely had a double burden.

Gradually it became plainer to his range of vision, and at last he exclaimed, in a positive way:

"One of the galoots has got a girl on the horse with him. Take it easy, boys. There has been some more abducting done, but that don't say anyone should get excited about it. We'll soon attend to this case."

He quickly gave orders to make the horses lie down, as he wanted the approaching riders to get as close as possible before they discovered that there was anyone waiting for them.

There is nothing surprising in the fact that Wild should think it was Arietta, who was being borne toward him by one of the villainous gang of mustang ropers.

She had often fallen into the hands of scoundrels, and her adventures and thrilling escapes had been many.

On came the two horses, and when they were within a little less than a mile of them, Wild and his partners knew who it was on the horse with the foremost of the riders.

The long golden hair told them enough, not to speak of the girl's dress.

"How do yer s'pose they got her, Wild?" asked the scout, as he fingered the trigger of his rifle.

"I don't know, Charlie," was the reply. "I suppose she was taken by surprise, the same as the other girl was. It won't surprise me much to see Anna and Eloise come along next. The mustang ropers are bent on abducting girls, it seems."

Rolly Wise was amazed when he found out that Arietta was being brought toward them by two of the villains belonging to the gang led by Bud Lenney.

"The scoundrels!" he exclaimed. "It must be that they planned this before they came to the dance last night."

"Quite likely," Wild answered, coolly. "But that's all right. I reckon we won't have to go back to the ranch now. One of the two galoots is the little sneak you caught. He is the one we want, you know."

"What! How could he have got away from the ranch?"

"Oh, we'll soon find out all about that. Just take it easy. Keep cool, everybody. We will soon rope the two galoots. I don't believe in hanging a man without a trial, but I am not going to raise a hand against anything you do after we get them. That little sneak is certainly well deserving of having his neck stretched, and as for that other fellow—well, he'll get his medicine."

Though our friends were lying low, they knew the approaching riders would surely see them before they got to them.

That meant that there would be an exciting chase.

But it would not last long.

Though their horses were tired, our hero and his partners were confident that they were capable of catching the mustangs the villains rode, and in short order, at that.

"Lay low, boys," cautioned Wild, as the two horses rapidly drew nearer. "They are apt to see us at any time now, so we may as well get them as close as possible. The moment they do spy us they will turn and ride off in another direction. Then you will all know what to do."

"Get after them like hot shot!" exclaimed Rolly Wise, with a nod of his head.

"That's it. Everybody be ready when the time comes."

Wild could easily have shot both men with his rifle, but he did not want to do that for two reasons.

The first was that by doing so his sweetheart would surely be hurled to the ground and perhaps badly injured; the second was that he had made a resolve to take them alive.

The time soon came to act.

When the two villains, who were no other than Lippy Grant and Billy Bent, were within a little less than a quarter of a mile of the ridge they caught sight of the horses and men lying down.

The effect upon them was instantaneous.

They pulled up the horses and swung around in a direction almost opposite.

Then Young Wild West gave the word, and the horses were up in a jiffy.

Mounting, the young deadshot and his friends started in pursuit.

The two villains rode for their lives, the fiend who held the girl never once relinquishing his grasp upon her.

Arietta, still unconscious from the effects of the chloroform, was held tightly by the leader of the mustang ropers. It was an exciting chase, but Young Wild West and his friends were surely gaining.

The young deadshot got his lariat ready.

"You had better give in, you sneaking coyotes!" he called out. "You don't stand a ghost of a show!"

"You'll never ketch us!" screamed Lippy Grant in a strange, unnatural voice. "Ther gal is mine!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE RESCUE OF ARIETTA.

Wild quickly took note of the fact that the sneaky fellow was without a weapon.

That made it easy for him to imagine that he had been released by the fellow with him, and that he had not had time to get hold of anything in the line of a gun.

This counted him out of it, as far as putting up a fight was concerned.

As our hero and his friends rapidly gained upon the villains Billy Bent put on an attitude of defiance.

Wild was swinging his lariat now, for the noble sorrel was bearing him down upon them as though they had been standing still.

Spitfire knew when to make a burst of speed without being urged to it.

Up came the dashing young deadshot, leading all the rest by a dozen lengths.

Whizz!

His rope went circling through the air and down came the noose over the head of the mustang that was carrying the double burden.

Wild did not attempt to throw the animal. He simply slackened speed slightly and pulled him around.

Grant came near losing his balance, but he recovered, and then he drew a knife to sever the rope.

Crang!

It was Jim Dart who fired the shot, and true to the mark went the bullet.

But the mark in this case was simply the knife and it went flying from the villain's hand.

We have called Lippy Grant the leader of the mustang ropers, but that only applied to the two of them. He certainly was the leader in the abduction of Arietta.

Wild saw the condition of his sweetheart.

She was unconscious, and that meant that the same drug that had been used in the case of Nellie Magee must have been applied to her.

He did not want her to be hurled to the ground.

"If the galoot lets go of her, shoot him dead, Charlie!" he called out, hoping to frighten the villain so he would give in.

His words had good effect.

Lippy Grant heard them and he thought surely that they were meant.

For the first time since the crazy spell had come over him he began to value his life.

"Whoa!" he called out, and then his horse came to a halt.

Our hero was at his side in less than two seconds.

Grant let him take the unconscious girl from him without a protest.

The scout rode up, and throwing his rope over the man's head and shoulders, pulled him from the saddle and dragged him over the ground for a few yards.

Meanwhile Jim and Rolly Wise were after the other mustang roper.

Jim soon got close enough to lasso him, and he was quickly jerked from the saddle.

Then he, too, was dragged around until the spot where our hero had dismounted was reached.

Both villains were now pleading for their lives.

But Young Wild West had no time to listen to them just then. He was trying to restore his sweetheart to consciousness.

The Cowboy Avengers stood over the two prisoners with drawn revolvers, waiting for the boy to tell them what to do.

Whether it was because her dashing young lover was bending over her, or whether she had been about to recover consciousness when rescued, Arietta opened her eyes just then.

"Wild!" she cried, joyously.

"That's right, little girl," was the reply. "You are all right now."

"Where am I?" and she half raised and looked around her.

"Away out on the cattle range. The two galoots chloroformed you, I reckon. They must have caught you before you knew it."

"They did, Wild. I was walking toward the well when I was seized, and then the horrid stuff stifled me. I knew what it was, and I tried to fight it off. But it was no use. Oh, I am so glad you came, Wild!"

"Well, you are no more glad than I am, Et. Now, just fight off the sickish feeling and you'll be all right. Chloroform makes the majority of people deathly sick after they return to consciousness, but you have been there before, and you have always pulled out of it quickly."

"I know I have, Wild; and I am going to fight this off, too! When persons make up their minds to fight a thing off it can be done. I know, because I have experienced it."

The girl now got upon her feet, with his assistance, and then the two walked around for a few minutes.

Arietta was conquering the effects of the powerful drug, and she knew it.

"I'll be able to eat breakfast when I get back to the ranch," she said, with a smile. "Now let's see the villains who caught me."

"Here they are, Miss Murdock," spoke up Rolly Wise. "One of them is the fellow we had locked in the closet, with his arms bound. The other fellow must have got him out in some way."

"He must have; but where were the men who were

supposed to be on the watch?" asked the girl, as she came forward and looked at the two scoundrels.

"They went ter sleep," answered Billy Bent, much to the surprise of all hands. "They was good enough ter go ter sleep, an' then Lippy comes along an' lets me out. I got ther bottle of chloroform fur him, an' then, when ther gal come out, he give her a good dose of it an' w lit out."

His eyes were turned upon our hero as he said this.

"Where did you light out for?" Wild asked, in his cool and easy way.

"Well, we was goin' straight ahead, I reckon, if you hadn't stopp'd us."

"Straight ahead, where?" questioned the boy, sharply. "Answer that question, or you'll be a dead man inside of five minutes."

"Well, I don't know jest where Lippy was goin'. He was doin' it, yer know. But I s'pose he was headin' fur ther hidden shanty in ther ravine."

"Hidden shanty, eh? Where is it?"

"I couldn't tell yer how ter git there if I tried ever so hard," and Billy shook his head.

"You could lead us there, though, couldn't you?"

"I might, if I was promised ter be let go after we got there."

"Well, I'll tell you what I'll do. If you lead us there, and we find Nellie Magee there, we'll let you mount your horse and ride away about your business."

"Yer will?" cried the sneak, his eyes brightening.

"Yes, I'll give you my word on that."

"All right. It's a go, then."

Cheyenne Charlie looked as though he wanted to say something, and so did the cowboys. But a glance from our hero caused them to remain silent.

"Wild hasn't promised that no one would start after him after he is allowed to go, Charlie," Jim whispered in the scout's ear.

A nod was the reply.

Then Charlie walked off and had a whispered conversation with the Cowboy Avengers, and all were more than satisfied.

Lippy Grant had stopped pleading for his life, and when questioned he now refused to talk.

Wild looked at him with eyes that flashed.

"You scoundrel, you!" he exclaimed. "You are not fit to live another minute! But I don't want to hang you, so I'll give you a chance for your life. Untie him, boys."

"What are yer goin' ter do with him?" queried one of the cowboys, who did not seem to like the idea of giving the man a chance.

"He calls himself a mustang roper," was the reply. "so I'll give him a chance to try his rope on me. I'll try mine on him at the same time. If he happens to rope me about the neck I'll be a goner, I suppose; and if I happen to do it with him he will be a goner. It is a square deal. I reckon."

"I'm satisfied ter that!" spoke up the prisoner, finding the use of his tongue all of a sudden. "I'm next ter Bud Lenney at ropin' mustangs, an' I reckon I ain't afraid ter take my chances with yer."

"All right, you sneaking coyote! Boys, take his gun

away from him. I don't want to be compelled to shoot him. This is going to be a duel with lariats, and nothing more."

The Cowboy Avengers looked at the dashing boy with admiration depicted on their bronzed faces.

He was taking a chance that was altogether unnecessary, they thought, but the daring he showed was enough to make them admire him.

Having made up his mind what he was going to do, Wild set about doing it.

The prisoner was released and his horse turned over to him.

Then our hero mounted the sorrel and began coiling his rope.

Lippy Grant seemed to be much pleased with the chance that had been given him.

"See here," he said; "Young Wild West, if I should happen ter choke yer ter death I'm ter go free, ain't I?"

"Yes," was the reply. "I reckon you can go free if you happen to do anything like that."

"All right. Then ther gal won't want you, 'cause you'll be a deader. Maybe she'll listen to me, then."

"She might."

Wild could hardly control himself as he spoke, but his coolness prevailed.

Arietta felt like shooting the scoundrel, but she knew it would not be in accordance with the wishes of her lover, so she remained perfectly silent.

The two were in the saddle, and without another word, they rode out a short distance and then faced each other.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ROPING OF A ROPER.

It certainly was a peculiar sort of duel that Young Wild West was going to fight with the villainous mustang roper.

The Cowboy Avengers, as they chose to call themselves, had never seen anything like it before.

They all knew that Lippy Grant was a good man at the business, since he had been at it so long.

So expert were the ten men working for Magee that they had been called the mustang ropers for several months.

Magee raised as many horses as he did cattle, and it required expert ropers to keep things straight on the ranch.

The air of our hero was one of extreme coolness and determination when he rode out and faced his man.

At throwing a lariat the young deadshot had never been beaten, and that gave him confidence in himself.

The two were about a hundred yards apart, and both sat in the saddle, arranging their lariats.

"Say when you're ready, you scoundrel!" called out Wild.

"I'm ready now," was the rather cool reply.

"Then let yourself go!"

Then both horses started off, each making a circle to the right.

As they neared each other the lariats began to whirl in a circle over their heads.

It was not an easy thing to catch a rider about the neck with the noose, especially when he knew what was coming.

But Wild meant to catch the villain napping.

That was the only way.

He knew if he could make the villain think he had a good opening, and make him throw the rope, he could, by being very quick, catch him.

The horses got into the spirit of the thing, it seemed, and the maneuvers they made were pretty, to say the least.

Around they went, each trying for an opening, the lariats whirling over their heads almost continually.

For nearly five minutes this thing kept up, and then Wild turned his horse as though he meant to charge straight upon the mustang roper.

He pretended to fumble his rope at the same time, and reached out with the other hand as though to catch it and get it right.

That was Lippy's chance—he thought.

Whizz!

His lariat flew in the air over the boy's head.

Whizz! Wild let his lariat go!

A touch with his heels against the sorrel's flanks caused him to leap forward like a shot, and down came the lasso over the neck of the villain.

The sorrel did not stop; neither did the mustang.

The result was that the rope tightened with a jerk and Lippy fell from the saddle.

Wild knew that it must have been an awful strain upon the man's neck, but he hardly thought it sharp enough to break his neck.

But such was the case, however.

When he dismounted and ran to the spot Lippy was dead.

With the applause of his partners and the Cowboy Avengers ringing in his ears, our hero turned and mounted his horse, after first removing the rope from the man's neck.

"I couldn't help it, Et," he said, as he rode back to his sweetheart and dismounted. "I didn't really want to break the man's neck, as much as I hated him for what he did to you. But it happened that way, and I am not going to cry over it."

"It served him right, Wild," was the reply. "I felt sure that it was going to happen. I never once feared that you would be roped by him. The man or boy don't live who could do that to you."

"Well, I am glad that you have got such an opinion of me. I like to hear you say it better than anyone else, little girl. But drop the subject. Do you think you can stand it to ride over to the hidden shanty, as the little galoot calls it?"

"Oh, yes, Wild! I am quite myself now. I have fought off the ill-feeling, and I am ready for anything. I am hungry, of course, but I can wait as long as the rest of you, I guess."

The young deadshot looked her over, and he quickly made up his mind that she was right in what she said.

The three cowboys with the young ranchman quickly gouged out a shallow grave, using their knives and fingers in the soft dirt of the prairie, and the body of the mustang roper was buried without ceremony.

This might seem strange to some of our readers. But what else could be done? They did not want to let the

body remain there for the coyotes and carrion birds to feed on.

If he had any companions who thought enough of him they had the privilege to come and inter the body over again, and with appropriate ceremonies.

Having seen so much of this sort of thing, even Arietta had become hardened to it.

It was not long before they were all riding for the ravine.

Billy Bent went along just like the rest, only he was unarmed, the same as when he had been liberated by Lippy.

They had not fairly got started when fully a dozen horsemen were seen approaching.

They were cowboys, or all but one of them was.

Wild quickly recognized him as Dick Magee, the ranchman.

"They are on the trail of the two galoots," he said, nodding to his companions. "Well, we'll ride along slow and let them overtake us. They might as well go along and see the finish."

In a few minutes the ranchman and the cowboys came up.

They had been hot on the trail of Lippy and the sneak, and when they found that Arietta and the latter named villain were there they cried loudly for vengeance.

Bill Bent turned pale at the new state of affairs.

"Don't let them kill me!" he cried, getting as close to our hero as he could. "Tell them what you have promised me. Hurry, before they shoot me!"

Wild held up his hand, as he brought the sorrel to a halt.

"Boys," said he, "the little sneak is in my charge now. Let him alone. He is taking us to the place where Bud Lenney went with the boss' daughter. Take it easy. The other galoot is dead, and that should satisfy you for the time, anyhow."

"Hooray fur Young Wild West!" shouted Red Baxter, who was one of the party. "I felt it in my bones that everything was goin' ter turn out all right, an' now I know it will. Hooray! Hooray!"

The rest took up the cheering and the air resounded with their shouts.

When they had subsided somewhat Wild told them just what had happened.

Then they had to cheer him again, and when that was done with Arietta came in for one.

The ranchman soon got alongside Billy Bent.

"You little varmint," said he, almost savagely, "you've got yourself in a nice fix, ain't yer?"

"Yes, but I'm goin' ter make it right, boss," was the frightened retort. "I'm goin' ter take yer all right ter ther place where I know Bud was goin' ter carry Nellie. Bud didn't mean ter hurt her, boss, I know that. He was hopin' she'd make up her mind ter give up Rolly Wise an' take him fur a husband."

"Yes, an' ther murderin' galoot wanted ter git Rolly out of ther way, didn't he?" queried the ranchman, angrily. "He got you ter do ther job; but yer made a mess of it. Yer tried ter stick a knife between Rolly's ribs, but yer couldn't do it. Oh, you miserable, hide-

bound galoot! I'm only waitin' fur ther chance ter git hold of ther rope that's goin' ter hang yer!"

"Me, too, boss," spoke up Red Baxter. "I'm one of ther mustang ropers, but I'm a man, for all that! I ain't no scoundrel, an' I never was, either. I done things what wasn't exactly right, maybe, but I never yet thought of killin' anyone fur spite, or of stealin' away an innercent gal. I'm jest as anxious ter hang ther galoots as you are. I reckon we kin git along without ther bad bunch all right. There's others as kin take their places."

"Right yer are, Red. You talk like a man, an' I'm sure yer are one. You're goin' ter have a hand in this game. You kin call yourself one of Rolly's gang now. What's that yer call it?" and he turned to his prospective son-in-law in an inquiring way.

"The Cowboy Avengers," was the reply. "That's a good name for us, I think."

"Yes, it's a mighty good name, Rolly. Young Wild West an' ther Cowboy Avengers! That sounds good, by gum!"

"An' yer kin bet they'll git in their fine work, too!" exclaimed Cheyenne Charlie.

White of face, and trembling like a frightened child, Billy Bent rode on with the party.

He did not seem to feel as though he had much show, but Young Wild West had promised him his liberty if he took them to the place where the girl was held a captive by Bud Lenney.

That was a chance, but—

He did not dare to even think what might happen after he got his freedom.

Once he thought he might stand a chance to break away and escape when they came to a place in the hills, but one look at the determined faces of those all around him told him how futile it would be.

"I'll take 'em there, an' then I'll have ter take what comes," he thought. "If Young Wild West only gives me a start I might git away, 'cause nobody knows ther country around these parts any better than I do."

The sun was not very high when they at length came to the ravine.

"There yer are," said the sneak, pointing to it. "Ther hidden shanty is in there."

"All right," answered Young Wild West. "You take us right to it. If we find the girl then you can have a chance for your life. You can ride away, a free man, and I promise you that I won't shoot at you."

CHAPTER XIV.

HOP HITS THE TRAIL.

It was some little time before Arietta was missed from the house—ten or fifteen minutes, probably.

Anna called to her, and failing to get a reply, went out of the house to look for her.

Not being able to find her anywhere about, she reported it to Ranchman Magee.

"Mighty strange," he said, shaking his head. "Maybe she went ter look at her horse in ther stable. I'll go an' see."

This he did, but could not find her, of course.

He came back to the house, and in coming in by the front way, he noticed that both the men, who had been

appointed to watch the closet where Billy Bent was confined, were sound asleep.

The ranchman stepped over and awoke them, using no gentle language in doing so.

"You're a putty pair!" he exclaimed. "Like as not ther prisoner has got away while you've been snorin'. Don't yer know that he might have had friends here, an' that they would let him go, rather than see him hung? This is what I calls bad work. Jest open ther door an' see if he's all right."

"Of course he's there, boss," one of them answered. "No one could have unlocked ther door an' let him out without us hearin' him. I ain't been asleep more'n two minutes, an' I know it."

He unlocked the door and looked into the closet.

It was empty, as far as anything like a prisoner was concerned, as the reader knows.

The two watchers were aghast, while the ranchman could hardly believe his senses.

"You took him out of here yourself, boss, jest ter show us what could happen while we was asleep," one declared.

"No!" shouted Magee, wildly. "You sleepy galoots, you! See what you've gone an' done. 'An' ther worst of it is that Young Wild West's gal, Arietta, ain't ter be found. Ther galoot has gone an' sneaked her off with him. Call every man on ther place here. Hurry up! I want ter find out somethin' about this business."

Instantly there was the greatest confusion at the ranch.

The cowboys were summoned, and the visiting ranchmen were aroused.

The two Chinamen and Delia, the Irish woman, got up, too, and then a search was made of the premises.

It did not take long to discover that the horses belonging to Billy Bent and Lippy Grant were missing.

Then it was easy to guess who had set the prisoner free.

"Come on, boys!" shouted Red Baxter. "I'm one of the mustang ropers, but I'll shoot ther galoots on sight. Come on, we'll git on ther trail right away!"

"I'll go, too!" exclaimed Magee. "There ain't no time fur breakfast. Git ther horses saddled!"

In a few minutes the party set out.

The trail was fresh and easy to follow, and away they went galloping over the prairie.

Shortly after that Hop and Wing sat down to breakfast in the kitchen.

No one else seemed to care about eating anything just yet, for the disappearance of Arietta had added to the gloom that had been cast upon the household by the abduction of Nellie Magee.

"Me go help findee soonee me gittee my bleakfast," said Hop, looking at the Irish woman and nodding his head in a wise way. "Me allee samee hittee um tlail, so be."

"I expect you could help find 'em!" sneered the woman, who had evidently forgotten what had happened the evening before. "What kin a haythen Chineee do, I'd like to know?"

"Me do allee samee velly muchee, so be. Me catchee um bad mans and puttee um snakee down um neck, so be! Me velly smartee Chineee."

Delia paled at the mention of snake.

Her late experience with it came to her very forcibly just then.

"Faith, I believe if you could find the villains you could frighten them, Hop," she admitted.

"Lat light. You hully uppee with um glub, and len me allee samee hittee um tlail."

Delia hurried.

In spite of the fact that there was an air of seriousness about the house, Hop got it in his head that he must play a joke on the Irish woman before leaving.

But he was going to finish his breakfast first, however.

Delia soon had a good meal of bacon and eggs, hot biscuits, fried potatoes and coffee before Hop and Wing, and they certainly did full justice to it.

She got ready to eat herself then, and as she turned to get the pot of hot coffee to fill her cup, which was at the side of her plate, Hop reached over and dropped a pinch of whitish powder in the cup.

That was all, but it was quite enough.

When Delia came with the coffee-pot she at once started to fill the cup from the spout.

But imagine her surprise when a sizzling noise came from the cup, and then it began foaming over like a sed-litz powder.

"Whattée mattee?" cried Hop, affecting alarm. But Wing went right on eating, for he knew his brother was simply playing another joke on the woman.

"Mother of Moses!" cried Delia, as she came near letting the pot of hot coffee drop. "What is the matter? Bedad! I believe ther coffee is after bein' bewitched!"

"Velly stlange," commented Hop, as he shook his head. "You makee velly funny coffee, so be. Maybe you allee samee puttee whisky in um coffee."

"Would that be after doin' it, Hop?" she asked, eagerly.

"Maybe do it, so be."

"Well, it might be that there was a drop of whisky in ther cup. I had some about an hour ago, but I thought I was after washin' ther cup, though."

"Lat whattee mattee, len," and the joking Chinaman appeared to be satisfied that the mystery was explained.

Delia got another cup, and this time she succeeded in filling it before Hop got a chance at it.

Hop finished his breakfast, but he lingered at the table a few minutes.

While Delia was not looking his way he hooked a fishing line to one of the warm biscuits that were on a plate.

He kept hold of the line, of course.

Presently the Irish woman reached for a biscuit.

It happened to be the very one that Hop had hooked that she reached for.

Zip! The biscuit gave a leap from the plate and landed on the floor.

Even Wing was so surprised at this that he let out a cry of alarm.

Hop acted as though he had been taken with a fit and went over backward, chair and all.

Delia did not scream, but she was very near to it.

But she was cute enough to think that maybe the Chinaman was responsible for what had happened, so she hastened to look for the biscuit.

But Hop was too clever for her, and he got the string away from it before she found it.

"Faith!" said she. "I don't know what to make of it. Such things were never after happenin' before. It is you, you rascal of a haythen! Stop it now, I say! Go on an' hit ther trail! Out with yez, or I'll take ther broom to yez!"

She ran for the broom, and Hop decided that it was time to get out.

He went on out, and then headed straight for the stable, where his horse was.

"Me allee samee go and helpee finde Missy Alietta," he muttered. "Me havee lillee goodee luck, so be. Me likee allee samee goodee chance at um lillee sneak! Me makee velly shortee workee!"

He soon had the horse saddled and bridled, and then he mounted and rode off the way the ranchman and the cowboys had gone.

He examined the big, old-fashioned six-shooter he always carried as he rode along, and finding it all right, slipped it into the pocket on the inside of his loose-fitting garment that might be called a coat.

The pocket had been made by him just for the purpose of holding the weapon.

There were others that had been made to hold quart bottles, and two of them were filled now.

When the clever Chinaman had covered about five miles he slackened the speed of his broncho and took a drink from one of the bottles.

The liquor they contained had been stolen from the closet in the ranch house the night before, but Magee was none the wiser, for he did not have any idea how much of the whisky had been used.

Hop kept on riding and in due time he came to the end of the trail.

This was where the ground became hard and stony, as has already been told.

"Which way me go now?" he asked himself, as he came to a halt and looked ahead in a puzzled way.

Just then he caught sight of a party of riders on a hill in the distance, and then he gave an exclamation of delight.

Then it was that Hop set out in a bee-line for the spot.

It so happened that he had caught sight of Young Wild West and the Cowboy Avengers about a minute before they came to the ravine, and when he got there he struck the trail again right away.

CHAPTER XV.

HOP TAKES A DROP.

Billy Bent led the way into the ravine, and as they struck the trail the mustang ropers had made the Cowboy Avengers felt like giving a shout.

But a warning shake of the hand from Young Wild West stopped anything like that.

"Boys, don't make a bit more noise than you can help," said the young dead-shot, addressing the cowboys.

He was assured that they would not, and then they proceeded.

Arietta was riding close at his side. The girl had almost fully recovered by this time, and she declared that when she got her breakfast she would feel as good as ever.

barring the loss of sleep she had been subjected to, on account of the abduction of Nellie Magee.

When they had covered nearly a mile the sneaking mustang roper pointed out the exact spot where the shanty was located.

Wild called a halt and cautioned them all to remain perfectly silent.

He dismounted, and calling Charlie, said:

"I reckon we'll try and find the shanty, Charlie. Arietta will go with us."

Both the scout and Arietta were off their horses in a hurry.

Our hero bade the rest to remain right where they were until they heard a signal to come on.

All hands dismounted and prepared to take a rest until the signal came.

The three quickly disappeared in the bushes, and then it was that Billy Bent began to grow more alarmed than ever.

But though the cowboys would have been pleased to take him to a tree and hang him, they knew that it was against the wishes of Young Wild West, so the little villain was safe.

Ten minutes passed and the signal was not heard yet.

Jim Dart began to grow a bit anxious.

If the shanty was as close as Billy Bent had said something should have turned up before this time.

But ten minutes more passed, and nothing was heard save the chirping of the birds and the hum of the insects that infested the thicket and woods above.

Jim was just making up his mind to go and see what had become of the three when the clatter of hoofs sounded back on the trail.

"Go and see who that is," he said to Red Baxter. "Make him stop the noise, whoever it is. If it happens to be one of the villains we are after don't shoot him, but nail him, so he'll hold up his hands and give in."

"All right," the cowboy answered, pleased at having been selected, and in a twinkling he was running through the bushes.

He came upon the approaching horseman right away.

It was Hop Wah, the clever Chinaman.

Red no sooner saw him than he showed himself and held up his hand warningly.

Hop reined in his broncho at once.

"Whattée mattee?" he asked in a low tone of voice.

"Yer want ter take it mighty easy," was the reply. "We're s'posed ter be putty close to ther place where ther gal was took. Come on up here."

When Jim saw who the newcomer was he was more than pleased.

He quickly had the Chinaman by the arm.

"Hop," said he, "I want you to go with me to find out what has become of Wild, Charlie and Arietta. You have got to be careful, though."

"Allee light, Misler Jim," was the reply. "Me allee samee undelstand, so be."

"Wise," said Dart, turning to the young ranchman. "you take charge. See that the prisoner don't get away, and that he is not harmed."

"All right," was the retort. "I'll do just as you say, Jim."

Hop was only too willing to go with Jim.

"Have you got anything to surprise them with in case we get into trouble?" Dart asked.

"Me gottee couple fireclackers, so be," was the reply.

"Well, they might come in handy. It might be that Wild, Charlie and Arietta have been tricked by the villains."

"Me gottee um gun allee samee loadce with um led and green fire, so be," and Hop pulled out the old-fashioned six-shooter.

"Good! You had better carry it right in your hand, and have it ready to fire at any time."

The two pushed on around the thicket.

The bushes had been torn and mussed so that it was easy to find the way.

The next minute they came to the shanty.

Jim put out his hand to keep Hop back.

But the Chinaman had conceived a sudden idea, and he meant to carry it out.

"Me go uppee lere, and len me allee samee gittee on um loof of um house," he said, in a low whisper. "Um hole in um loof, and me allee samee lookce thlough, so be."

Jim could not help smiling at the Chinaman's earnestness.

"All right," said he; "go on."

Hop had seen a way to get up the bank, and he knew he could easily get upon the roof, which was a thatched one, from the bank.

Dart had no sooner told him to go ahead when he was off.

The boy crouched in the bushes in plain sight of the shanty and waited.

Hop quickly reached the top of the bank.

There was the roof of the shanty right before him.

It looked firm, and as he noticed that there were spots the daylight could get through, he made up his mind to see what was inside.

He crept down softly.

Then he reached out and tried the roof.

There was every evidence that it would hold his weight easily.

"Me finde outee sometling velly muchee quickee now," he thought, and then he put his weight on the roof and started to crawl up the slant.

Hop was just about half way to the peak when there was an ominous cracking sound.

He knew what was coming, and he made a grab at something to save himself.

But too late!

About one-third of the roof fell in with a crash, and he went with it, of course.

But he had enough presence of mind to hold on his big revolver.

The moment he landed he pulled the trigger of the weapon.

A streak of green fire came from the muzzle, and striking the dry material the roof was made of, ignited it in a twinkling.

"Murder! Murder! Don't kill me!" cried someone in the shanty.

Hop was hardly on his feet when Jim rushed in the door.

The boy not only saw the Chinaman, but a man lying on the floor, bound hand and foot.

It was the latter who had cried out in fear at what had happened.

Jim paid no attention to Hop, or the blaze, either, but went straight to the helpless man.

It was one of the mustang ropers, and that made him feel that Wild and the others must be safe."

"Help me drag this galoot out, Hop," he said. "There is no use in letting him be burned alive."

They got the man outside, and then Jim looked at him sternly and said:

"Where is Young Wild West?"

"He's gone after Bud Lenney an' ther gal," was the reply. "Chuck is with 'em, too. I was tryin' ter git ther horses, an' I was ketched. I s'pose it must be all over with by now, fur nothin' seems ter stop Young Wild West."

CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION.

Wild and Charlie and Arietta found the hidden shanty just in time to see a man untying the horses that belonged to the villains.

The dashing young deadshot quickly covered him.

"Just make one little sound and you'll die!" he told him, in a voice that showed he meant business. "Where is the girl?"

"Jest gone up there with Bud Lenney," was the reply in a trembling whisper. "They seen yer comin'."

"They did, eh? Who do you mean by they?"

"Bud an' a man named Chuck. I didn't see yer, but Bud told me ter git ther horses an' come on up at ther first place I found where I could lead ther horses up."

Our hero believed that the man spoke the truth, and not knowing just what else to do with him, they quickly bound him hand and foot and put him in the shanty until they came back.

Then they went up the bank, and in a few seconds they were hot upon the trail made by the escaping villains.

"I reckon it won't take us long, so we won't let the rest know what we are up to," said Wild. "We'll fix this thing up ourselves."

Wild felt that it must be but a few minutes before they would overtake the fugitives.

There were but two men, and handicapped with the girl prisoner, they could not make very fast headway.

The trail ran on through the woods in a zig-zag fashion, for in some places the bushes and undergrowth was so thick that it could hardly be penetrated.

Rocks, hills and hollows were plentiful in the timber patch, but the trail was right there all the time.

Of course our three friends were not making any more noise than was possible, for they wanted to surprise the villains, and not be surprised themselves.

On kept our hero and his sweetheart, with the scout, who was determined to see the end of it.

When about half an hour had passed since they left Jim Dart and the rest in the ravine Wild began to think

that he had made a mistake in not calling to the rest, and letting them join in the pursuit.

But it was too late for that now. They must go on alone, if they meant to save the girl.

Ten minutes more and they suddenly came in sight of the fugitives.

They had paused at the edge of the ravine, and both men were looking anxiously down, as though they were expecting to see their partner coming with the horses.

Bud Lenney had hold of the girl, who was pale with fear.

Her hands had not been tied, but there was a rope about her waist, which would keep her from breaking away from the villain.

Our three friends crept cautiously to within a few feet of them.

"Bud," the villain who had come with the leader of the mustang ropers said just then, "I reckon that he got ketched. He never got away with ther mustangs. If he had he would have been along here afore this."

"Maybe he did git ketched," was the reply. "If he did it means that we'll git it sooner or later. What kin we do without horses? If Young Wild West happens ter git on our trail it will soon be all up with us. But there's jest this one thing about it!" and the man looked at his fair captive fiercely. "I ain't never goin' ter give up ther gal alive! If she can't be mine, Chuck, she can't be nobody's! You hear what I say? I'm goin' ter kill her rather than give her up!"

"I hear yer, Bud. But there ain't no use in doin' such an awful thing as that. If we git nabbed it will be all ther better fur us if ther gal's found ter be all right, an' nothin' worse than scared."

"It won't make a bit of difference which way it is. If Young Wild West an' ther cowboys gits us it'll be all up with us, an' you know it! They'll hang us so quick that we won't hardly know what's happenin'. No! Ther gal ain't goin' ter live a second after I see 'em comin', Chuck!"

"All right. Go ahead. It's your affair, anyhow. I'm mighty sorry I ever jined in with yer. I'm goin' ter git my neck stretched, or else git a few bullets through my carcass, jest because I was fool enough ter help you steal a gal. Well, I reckon it won't never happen ag'in."

Cheyenne Charlie grinned at this remark.

"I reckon it won't," he whispered, as he played with the trigger of his gun.

Just then Bud Lenney drew a knife from the sheath that hung to his belt.

"See that, Chuck," he said, a fiendish light shining in his eyes. "That's fur ther gal! Jest let 'em come now!"

Then it was that Nellie Magee uttered a scream.

"Help!" she shrieked. "Save me! Save me!"

She managed to break away from the scoundrel, but the rope about her waist held her to him.

Wild leaped through the bushes, just as Bud raised his knife to plunge it in the back of the girl.

Crack!

A sharp report sounded and Bud Lenney sank to the ground, a bullet in his brain.

It was not Young Wild West who had fired the shot, but his sweetheart, Arietta.

The girl had realized that Wild might not reach the villain in time to stop the blow, and she had fired.

As he saw his leader go down the villain called Chuck made a leap toward Wild, his finger on the trigger of his revolver.

Cheyenne Charlie had started for the scene, and happened that a bush hid the villain from him.

But Arietta saw what was up, and again she pressed the trigger of her revolver.

Down went Chuck!

The other shot had been to save the girl; this one had been to save her lover, dashing Young Wild West.

She hurried through the bushes and came face to face with Nellie.

Then the two embraced and tears of joy streamed down the cheeks of the rescued one.

"Charlie, I reckon that will be about all," said Wild as he looked at the two bodies on the ground. "You shot one, and Arietta the other, I suppose?"

"Arietta dropped both of 'em," was the reply. "I didn't see what was goin' on ther last time. I was jes gittin' through ther bushes."

Without any loss of time, they started back.

Nellie Magee had long since recovered from the effect of the chloroform, but she was weak from the severe strain that had been put upon her body and mind.

They made their way back much quicker than they had come.

Before they got there they saw the smoke and flame, and they then realized that the shanty was being burned.

Three minutes later they came upon the scene of the fire.

The shanty was all but down now, and hanging to a tree near it were two swaying bodies.

They were Billy Bent and the man Jim and Hop had found in the shanty.

Jim had tried his best to stop the Cowboy Avengers, but it was no go.

When they learned that Bud Lenney had got away with the girl they would hang the two, and that was all there was to it.

Two hours later the party reached the ranch, and to say that everybody was happy would hardly express it.

There had been an exciting time since the day before, but now there was time for rest and recreation.

So this ends the story of the Cowboy Avengers and the Mustang Ropers.

THE END.

Read "YOUNG WILD WEST AND 'VELVET BILL'; or, BAFFLING THE BANDIT BAND," which will be the next number (341) of "Wild West Weekly."

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SOME GOOD ARTICLES.

New York's Bide-a-Wee Home is a combination cat and dog boarding-house and home for the friendless. Last year the home received 1,871 dogs and 1,329 cats. Of the dogs, homes were found for 1,288, while 825 cats were placed in new quarters.

A complete set of the signatures of the signers of the Declaration of Independence recently sold for \$2,850. A Portsmouth (N. H.) man has a nearly complete set, which includes that of Button Gwinnett, which is very rare.

All local followers of Izaak Walton are greatly gratified over the strange catch made by James J. Raymond, of St. Paul, which was no more nor less than a swordfish. The specimen was three feet long and had a sword more than six inches in length. It was caught in the Eau Claire River below the Eau Claire linen mill dam with an ordinary hook and line. As a swordfish is a salt water inhabitant there is much speculation as to the way in which this specimen came to be so far from the brine.

Paul Mounet appeared at Havre recently as the Missionary Bishop in "Le Duel." As he lighted a cigar at the wings an officer of the fire brigade informed him that he must not smoke in the theater. "But it is in the play," exclaimed M. Mounet. "I am smoking as I go on, and then I throw my cigar on the stage." "Very well," replied the officer. So M. Mounet made his entree as usual, but following him were two firemen, one of them with a bucket of water and the other with a huge sponge. The audience, appreciating the situation, roared and applauded with delight, and M. Mounet carefully deposited his cigar in the bucket, and wiped his fingers on the sponge before proceeding with the dialogue. They enforce the regulations against theater fires in France.

The peanut counties of Virginia are the tidewater ones of Surrey, Isle of Wight, Nansemond and Southampton; and these probably produce more peanuts than any other area of equal size in the world. In Smithfield, Isle of Wight County—an historic little town, remote from the railway—is to be found the largest peanut factory in existence. The yearly output of this establishment averages 350,000 bags of peanuts, valued at \$1,500,000. They are shipped by boat to Norfolk, which is the largest market for this product in the United States. This country furnishes about one hundred million pounds of peanuts annually, which is one-sixth of the entire crop of the

world. Small quantities of peanuts are raised in a number of other counties in Virginia, and the industry has attained considerable importance in North and South Carolina and in East Tennessee. The home of the peanut or ground pea (also often called pindar and goober) is believed to be Brazil, although it very soon spread to Africa, China, Japan and India, and was recognized as a valuable agricultural product in these countries long before it was cultivated on a large scale in its native soil, which was not until the year 1870. In the Old World, however, it has always been planted and harvested for the sake of the oil it yields; this is said to rival olive oil in quality and to be used for the same purposes. The nuts raised in the East are far richer in oil than the American varieties. The most popular of the American peanuts is the "Virginia running variety." It is a leguminous plant having leaves resembling those of the alfalfa, but borne on wide-spreading branches that grow flat on the ground. The blossom is bright yellow and is formed at the end of a long tube having the ovary at its base. After the flower has fallen its stalk elongates and bends downward, pushing its way several inches into the ground. Here the ovary enlarges and develops into the well-known pod. The pod and nut of the Virginia variety are twice as large as those of the North Carolina or African peanut. The Spanish nuts, usually sold only after being shelled and salted, are still smaller.

GRINS AND CHUCKLES.

Robbie (at the opera)—Mamma, what does papa keep going out between the acts for? Mother—Sh, he goes out for opera glasses.

"Margaret, it was very naughty of you to make such a fuss. You said if I'd buy you that new dollie, you'd go to the dentist's without a murmur." "I didn't murmur, muvver, I screamed."

"What are these notches in your gun?" asked the flirt, who was visiting the ranch. "They represent men," replied Cactus Sim, "who thought they wuz smarter than I was." "A good idea! I'll have to notch my parasol handle."

Caller—Do you think the doctor is going to help you, Mr. Jones? Jones—He may, if I can only follow his orders. He told me to drink hot water thirty minutes before every meal, but it is hard work to drink hot water for thirty minutes.

Uncle Ned—I've bought you a nice little dog, Johnny—the best one you ever saw. Johnny (looking at the dog somewhat dubiously)—I don't think I'll like him. Uncle Ned (astonished)—Why, what's the matter? Johnny—There ain't enough tail to tie a can to.

The teacher of one of the rooms in a school in the suburbs had been training her pupils in anticipation of a visit from the school inspector. At last he came, and the classes were called out to show their attainments. The arithmetic class was the first called, and in order to make a good impression the teacher put the first question to Johnny Smith, the star pupil. "Johnny, if coal is selling at \$5 a ton, and you pay the coal dealer \$20, how many tons of coal will he bring you?" "Three," was the prompt reply from Johnny. The teacher, much embarrassed, said "Why, Johnny, that isn't right." "Oh, I know it ain't, but they do it, miss."

THE LITTLE ORDERLY

By KIT CLYDE.

Several years ago a Mr. James O. Taylor was appointed one of the sub-Indian agents in Arizona. The agency of which Mr. Taylor had charge lay on the extreme frontier, and at times was hardly regarded safe.

He was located at a fort where a small trading post had suddenly sprung up, and a company of soldiers was thought sufficient to guard the agency. These were under command of Lieutenant Charles R. Pierson, a brave but careless officer of the U. S. A.

For the last few months after his arrival at the agency, everything had been so quiet that Mr. Taylor brought out his family, consisting of two lovely little girls of fourteen and eleven years of age.

The girls found it very lonesome at the old fort, and soon began to pine for their associates at home.

The only person near their own age was a boyish-looking sergeant, named Rush. Johnny Rush was only eighteen years of age, and had been but a few months in the army, yet for his sterling worth and intelligence had been promoted to orderly sergeant in his company.

The captain and second lieutenant were away, one at an eastern watering place, and the other home; so the entire command fell on Lieut. Pierson. He being too indolent to attend to the business, threw the principal part on Johnny Rush, the little orderly, as he was called.

Johnny bore this double duty with perfect good nature, never murmuring. He soon became a great favorite with the children of Mr. Taylor. When not required to be on duty, he devoted a portion of his time to their amusement.

They frequently took rides upon the plain on spirited but docile little Indian ponies. Both the girls were excellent riders, and Johnny was a gallant escort.

One morning Lieut. Pierson informed the little orderly that he was going to take a squad of men and set out for Prescott.

"Why, lieutenant," he said, in astonishment, "is it not a little rash to start there now? It is fully seventy-five miles away, and we have not had any very pleasant news lately."

"Oh, bosh!" replied the negligent lieutenant, who, when his mind was made up, changed for nothing. "If one gets scared at every whisper the wind sends over the prairies he will be eternally scared."

"But, lieutenant, when our scout came in last he reported the Apaches in large force not far away," persisted the little orderly.

"What do I care for that? I shall only take twenty men with me, and I'll risk it with them. That will leave forty-two here with you in the fort. You can surely defend it against all the Apaches in the territory with that many men."

"I shall do my duty," answered the young soldier, with a sigh.

The lieutenant then detailed a duty sergeant and nineteen men to accompany him. They saddled their horses, and galloped away over the plain.

Mr. Taylor looked uneasy after the retiring cavalcade, and wished from his heart they had not gone.

The little orderly felt that a great responsibility rested on him, and he took every precaution to make the fort safe. It had been erected some three or four years ago, and consisted of three blockhouses in a triangular shape, with slight earthworks and palisades, making the triangle complete.

Upon a careful inspection he found many of the palisades so rotten that they could almost be pushed down, and the fortification was very weak in three or four places.

He set men to work making the repairs that had been needed so long.

"Can we not go riding on the plain, papa?" said Lillie to her father, as they walked about watching the men at work.

"You must not go to-day, my darling," said the father, gazing anxiously over the plain. "I have heard that there are Indians not far away."

Lillie sighed, and seeking her sister Hannah, told her they could not go. Then they both sighed and said what a lovely afternoon it was, and wished papa was not so scarey.

The gates of the fort were open, and the soldiers not engaged on the works were strolling back and forth. The guard walked lazily along his beat, and wished he was off duty that he might go to sleep.

The fort was on the head waters of a small stream, which was fringed with a fine growth of forest trees. The grove came to within a few hundred yards of the fort. A guard of two men had been placed there, who were passing away the time with a greasy deck of cards.

The little orderly was still urging on his men in the work of repairing. It was the middle of the afternoon and the soldiers were lazily digging and pecking away.

The crack of a rifle down in the direction of the picket post started all.

"To arms, fall in!" cried the little orderly.

In an instant the long roll sounded, making the earth tremble with the roar, and the men sprang to their muskets, buckling on their belts and accoutrements.

"What does it mean, father, why does that awful drum beat so fearful?" asked the frightened Hannah.

"That is summoning the men to death," answered Mr. Taylor as with pale, almost bloodless lips, he stood at the door of the blockhouse.

A volley of gun shots, and a chorus of yells came from the woods. They saw one of the sentries flying toward the fort, with fully three hundred painted Indians after him.

Shot after shot was fired at the poor fellow as he ran for life. He dropped his gun, and ran on. A ball knocked his hat off, and he ran the faster. Now he limps. His arm is shattered, and he is failing, but continues to run; his comrades in the fort cheering him on. He is struck in the shoulder, almost falls, but continues to limp feebly forward. At last, when almost safe within the walls of the fort, he sinks and dies from a shot through the body.

The soldiers fully appreciated the deadly foe with whom they had to contend. The prairie was covered with the red demons speeding forward like the wind, on foot and horseback.

The well-disciplined troops began a steady and effective fire, as soon as they were in range, which they returned from three hundred rifles.

The battle raged; the rattle of firearms, roaring shouts of many voices, drowning the feeble groans of the dying. The smoke covered the plain and rolled over the fort.

The little orderly was everywhere, encouraging his men to their utmost, in coolness and precision of aim.

This had been only a sub-outpost, and a strong guard had never been deemed necessary for it, consequently was but illy prepared for the attack.

The frightened children, whose ears were unaccustomed to the flash of guns and shouts of combatants, clung frantically to their father.

Some places in the palisades were so weak that the sergeant had constant fears of a breach being made. He kept a strong force at the weak places, and the men being good marksmen, kept the enemy away.

During a lull in the attack, Mr. Taylor approached the

young sergeant, and asked what their chances were for beating the enemy off.

"I can't say," said Johnny, shaking his head. "They outnumber us five to one, and may have reinforcements coming. We will die like men, Mr. Taylor. If we cannot save your family, we can die trying."

"Noble fellow, gallant soldier," said Mr. Taylor, his eyes growing moist. "I will not permit you to do all the fighting. I see yonder a poor soldier lying on the ground, who has fought his last battle. His gun is at his side. I shall take it and become a common soldier in your ranks and help in our mutual defense."

The remainder of the day was spent in constant fighting. Sometimes in repelling a charge on one side, then on another. Then came intervals in which only an occasional dropping shot could be heard. The soldiers had fought well, and the plain was strewn with dead and dying savages.

Mr. Taylor shared the common danger and fatigue with them, and they lifted their caps in silent admiration of his coolness and bravery as the enemy retired out of gun range, to form another plan of attack.

"Mr. Taylor," said the little orderly, with a look of intense anxiety on his face, "I feel it my duty to make a startling discovery to you."

"What is it?" said the man, calmly.

"We are almost out of ammunition, and cannot possibly hold out until morning. Even if we were well supplied, the works are too weak to withstand the cunning and desperation of our enemies during the night. As soon as it is dark enough to cover their approach, they will advance in a body on us. They will not be seen perhaps until within the walls of the fort. There will be a few moments maddening, desperate fighting, and then all will be over. Some may escape in the general confusion, but it will be few."

"I feel in my heart every word you utter to be the truth," replied Mr. Taylor, "and I am strongly impressed that I shall be among those who fall. I have a request to make of you—that is, that you will rescue my little girls, if possible. In the general melee, you may find an opportunity to escape with them. Will you do so?"

"I shall, or die!" and then the Indian agent wrung the hand of the young soldier in silence.

Darkness gathered about the plain, creeping over the earth like one vast, dark pall.

There were creeping, moving objects, unseen and unheard, but felt by all within the fort. They came crawling over the plain among the slain, and stealthily to the palisades.

It seemed as if the furies of a volcano had burst upon the fort. The earth shook with yells, the heavens were red with blazing guns, the enemy poured through, under and over the palisades, and joined in hand-to-hand combat with the soldiers.

Johnny Rush remained to give a last command—to know that all was over—to see Mr. Taylor fall dead at his feet—and hastened away in the darkness to where Hannah and Lillie stood behind a blockhouse, trembling with terror.

"Come!" he whispered to them, "all is lost, and we must escape if we can."

He led them through the back way, and out on the plain. They ran for some distance, and then paused on the dark broad prairie to gaze back on the scene.

The Indians were still shooting and stabbing the soldiers, some of whom were fighting stubbornly. The blockhouses were on fire, and they made haste to get out of the circle of the light.

Some of the survivors of the general massacre had escaped, and were running over the plain as fast as they could; some pursued, and many killed by the relentless red foe.

The young orderly hurried his little companions on as fast as possible, encouraging them by kind words, and even carrying them by turns in his arms. Thus a long, weary night passed, and by morning they were far away from the late scene of carnage. They concealed themselves in a thick chaparral during the sultry day that followed. Another weary night's travel without food, and at dawn the next day they were picked up by a body of soldiers sent out expressly to find survivors of the massacre. They were taken, worn out and half starved, to a military post.

This event happened several years ago, and as the young reader is always anxious to learn the final disposition of a character, we will add that Johnny Rush, the little orderly, is now post-captain on the frontier, and Hannah Taylor, now Mrs. Rush his wife, is one of the most beautiful women in the Far West.

THE MICMACS OF NEWFOUNDLAND

In a report to the British Colonial Office Sir William McGregor, Governor of Newfoundland, gives an account of a visit he paid to the settlement of Micmacs, who are held by ethnologists to be a branch of the Algonquin Indians, at Bay d'Espoir, on the south of the island, says the Montreal Standard.

There are only twenty-three families living on the reservation, consisting of 131 persons, and although Sir William doubts whether there is a single pure-blooded Micmac on the island, he is of the opinion that the community in question is not likely to be absorbed in the European population for some generations. He therefore suggests that something should be done for the inhabitants.

The Micmacs are hunters and trappers, and are ignorant alike of agriculture, seamanship and fishing. On the visit of the Governor there were only two miserable cows in the settlement, and a few extremely wretched sheep, and he saw only one fowl and a "tame wild goose." The food consisted chiefly of flour, a few potatoes and cabbage, and caribou meat, while the majority of the people were in rags.

Notwithstanding these obvious hardships, the inhabitants are generally healthy; the oldest woman was ninety years of age, and the oldest man about eighty. The men are described as of good size and strongly built, clearly of mixed descent, and many being nearly like Europeans. The children, who are bright and clever, have all, without exception, very dark, soft eyes, straight black hair, and the nose much more prominent than in the Esquimaux of Labrador. Intoxicating drink is practically unknown in the settlement.

In religion the Micmacs are Roman Catholics, and they have a small church, which is decently well built and kept. Oddly enough, there is a large inscription over the entrance, stating that spitting in the church is totally prohibited. The parish priest visits the community once a month, and in his absence one of the natives reads the service on Sunday.

The last statement suggests a certain amount of education among these Indians. They have, in fact, a small school, carried on in a room 12 feet by 15 feet, with a stove and two little windows. There are thirty-four children on the roll, and the teacher, a woman of mixed race, who depends upon a small allowance from the priest and such fees as she can collect, was congratulated by Sir William on what she had been able to accomplish under the circumstances.

Sir William MacGregor proposed to help the community by providing a more suitable location, supplying seed potatoes and a few animals, and adding especially a good school for the young.

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